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INTRODUCTION

Repeated visits were necessary to complete the studies. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, however, each report is presented as the result of one visit of continuous interviews. Though this necessitated telescoping the time element, it in no way affects the material contributed by the persons interviewed.

Today sorcery is still practiced. Modern root doctors, visited frequently by their superstitious clients, perform mystic rites and promise to work miracles and cures. Many coastal Negroes view adversity not as the workings of fate but as the revenge of a personal enemy brought about by the mystic working of the conjure doctor. To this type of Negro there is little talk of "bad luck." To him it is "bad mouth" set against him by an enemy.

It is understandable that the older coastal Negro's use of ceremony and even the ordinary routine of his daily life are influenced profoundly by his beliefs. His imagination continues to crowd his world with spirits, both good and evil. Spirits of the departed are still believed to make frequent visitations to the earth and are as real to this type of Negro as his next door neighbor. Into his Christian ceremonies these superstitions and customs have been injected, lending a distinctiveness not found in many of the white man's ceremonies.

As the field of opportunity widens for the Negro and as his culture begins to approximate that of his white neighbor, it is among this fast vanishing type that the remnants of folk memories still live, without which this collection of source material could not have been compiled.

MARY GRANGER, *District Supervisor*
Georgia Writers' Project

Savannah, Georgia
November 4, 1940.

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Old Fort

361 DUSTY, WINDY LANES BORDERED WITH ROWS OF squat wooden houses, wide paved streets lined on each side with paintless one-story frame structures, the smells of river, fishboats, fertilizer plants and escaping gases, and overshadowing all, the gigantic gas reservoirs. That is the impression given by the Negro section of the Old Fort, located in the extreme northeastern section of Savannah. Here life goes on serenely for days, months. Then suddenly, 682 as it happened only a short time ago on a calm Sunday 754 morning, a woman is stabbed in the back and left writhing on the pavement to die before a swiftly gathering crowd. It was whispered among the frightened spectators that the death was caused by conjure, for despite all efforts to remove the knife it remained firmly embedded in the victim's back.

363 The streets present a monotonous aspect because of the absence of grass and trees. Yet the pedestrian is frequently 361 surprised to come upon a dead-end alley blocked by an old brick tenement house with lovely arched windows or to find gay flowers in boxes and tin cans on some of the low stoops. On several corners the houses abruptly give way to small grocery stores or beer parlors.

368 There are two Baptist churches and one Sanctified church in the Negro part of the Old Fort. Although the people .771 are devout believers in all the tenets of the Christian faith, many of them, particularly the old ones, are bound by older beliefs and superstitions. There exists among them a deep-

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rooted fear of the unknown. Spirits, ghosts, and "cunjuh" all powerfully influence their daily existence.

Young and middle-aged persons, reticent before strangers, appear dubious and suspicious. They profess great knowledge of conjure and superstitions, but they hasten to say that they "sho ain't gonuh tell nobody" what they know about these things. The old inhabitants, more loquacious, enjoy relating their beliefs and customs to a willing listener.

Among the older inhabitants is Aunt Mary,* the daughter of a slave, who remembers the days when rice fields lay east of the town and it was no unusual sight to find a big "'gatuh" caught in the rice canal. Early morning finds Aunt Mary hobbling to her work of scrubbing the entrances to stores. In going to and from work she always drags a broom behind her. When we asked the reason for this, she answered, "'Cuz uh dohn wants none uh deze fixuhs tuh git muh foot track, cuz den dey kin hanl yuh jis lak dey wants tuh."[7]

"Do you really believe that, Aunt Mary? Do you believe in dreams and ghosts too?"

"I sho does belieb in dreams an ghoses. Ef uh hab suttn dreams, dey sho comes true. Tuh dream uh fresh poke some uh yuh kin folks gwine die; fresh beef mean duh det uh some wite pusson yuh knows well. Tuh dream uh a dead pusson is a sho sign uh rain, an anudduh sign uh rain is wen a suttn place on muh head itches."

The old woman switched her broom around under the other arm and continued, "As fuh ghoses, ain't uh got tuh belieb in um?[8] Wy, I kin see um muhsef. Yuh see, I wuz bawn wid a double caul obuh muh face an anybody knows dat a pusson bawn wid a caul obuh dey face kin sho see ghoses.[4] Deah's mo dan one kine uh ghos. Some come befo yuh natchul an pleasant; den some kin sho make yuh sked. I kin tell long fo anyting happen wen it gwine happen.

* *Mary Hunter, 548 East St. Julian Street.*

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*Yamacraw**

YAMACRAW TAKES ITS NAME FROM THE LITTLE INdian town that Tomochichi, chief and friend of General Oglethorpe, established on the Savannah River bluff west of the township of Savannah over two hundred years ago. Today waterfront industries have pushed the Negro district southward from the bluff, but it is still so close to the river that some of the small shanties rattle when winds roar across the water.

In this community the residents are drawn largely from coastal counties of Georgia and South Carolina. At one time an unruly element gained Yamacraw the reputation of being the toughest section of Savannah, but the presence of an unusual number of churches of various denominations seems to have improved law and order in recent years. Intense religious interest is aided by pride felt in the fact that the first Negro Baptist church in America was established here and also that Methodism gained an earlier start among Yamacraw Negroes than in any other part of the county.

In spite of the difference in religious doctrines there seem to be certain common beliefs handed down in families. We found an implicit and readily asserted faith in the power "tuh do unnatchul ting." Ghosts are everyday experiences. Root doctors are in constant demand.

* *Old Yamacraw has gone. Since late in 1939 there has been a radical physical change under the program of the Federal Housing Administration. Two thirds of the tumble-down brick houses and wooden shanties in the once crowded area have been replaced by modern concrete buildings with low rentals for Negro tenants.*

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Springfield

361 ROWS OF FADED GREY HOUSES, HUDDLED CLOSE TOgether and facing on narrow dirt lanes, house the population of Springfield, a Negro community lying west of Savannah near the city waterworks. In the neighborhood are several [368] wooden churches of various denominations, a well constructed modern brick school building, and a number of stores that supply the six hundred odd Negroes of the community.

•791 Many of the houses are shuttered, dim and quiet. So [787] somber an atmosphere prevails that it is easy to imagine the spectral figures that the Negroes claim they see wandering at night along the twisting pathways. It is not surprising to be told of the sinister powers which are constantly at work and against which many inhabitants of this locality are always on guard.

115 A familiar figure in the neighborhood is James Washing- [791] ton,* famed locally as a fortune teller and root doctor. I [759] is said that Washington's patronage is growing steadily; [22a. c. 46] each day new clients visit his dilapidated house, seeking advice or perhaps a cure for some puzzling ailment that has descended upon them.

791 The consulting room is smoky, airless, and reeking with a 347 queer pungent odor. The shades are drawn down tightly, [352] and when a visitor is being given advice the door is shut securely against intrusion. The furniture is scant, consisting of a lamp on a plain table, a couch for the visitor, and placed directly across the room a wooden armchair in which sits the 353 dealer in magic. The most remarkable object in the room is

* *James Washington, Springfield.*

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754 ride im.[69] Dis went on till he staht pinin away. He git disagreeable roun duh home an denne went away. He ain nebuh come back. I tink somebody git uh tuh fix im.[15] Dat sho convince me uh duh powuh uh cunjuh."

775 The spirits of the dead are believed to return and visit their former neighbors, sometimes as frequently as in life.[56] Their presence is not always regarded with dread but is often looked upon as a natural incident. One woman made the following statement: "I know deah's ghos, fuh I kin see um. Ef any uh muh friens die, I kin see um mos anytime. Dey peah jis as natchul as wen dey wuz libe."

• 771 178 On the fringe of the community was a small store at which we stopped for a few minutes. The proprietress, a robust, good-natured Negro woman of middle age, talked with us amiably and verified the numerous reports regarding superstitions that her neighbors had already confided in us. In parting we inquired if she thought the people's faith in the supernatural was weakening. The woman regarded us with a wide smile. Shaking her head she declared emphatically, "No, ma'am, dey sho ain losin no faith in magic an sech tings. All deah libes dey heah bout um frum duh ole folks. Seem lak tuh me dey beliebin in um mo an mo all duh time."

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White Bluff

HUGE, MOSS-HUNG OAKS FORM A CANOPY AND CAST filigreed shadows upon the White Bluff Road, which passes directly through the quiet Negro community of White Bluff, eight miles southeast of Savannah.

Winding roads turn from the main highway and terminate in the various sections which form the settlement and which are known as Nicholsonboro, Rose Dhu, Twin Hill, and Cedar Grove. The sections east of the White Bluff Road are on the Vernon River. It is here that many of the inhabitants make their living by catching crab and fish which they sell in the city markets. West of the highway the narrow roads lead through thickly wooded areas of great beauty. Along these roads families have cleared small tracts and built their homes, reserving garden space for flowers and vegetables. In the summer wild crepe myrtle trees, with blossoms as luscious a red as the heart of the watermelon, contrast colorfully with the bright blue paint on the doors and trimmings of some of the houses.

The White Bluff Road, which for two miles forms the main street of the community, passes the houses of other residents set well back from the road. Most of them are small and unpretentious but well kept. At intervals of perhaps half a mile are three rural grocery stores; farther along is a whitewashed church with red and blue glass windows, and at the farthest extremity of the settlement is a similar but larger church.

The inhabitants, of which there are approximately four

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hundred, are deeply religious and lay great stress on being "Christian people." Many of the older inhabitants were formerly slaves on a large plantation on St. Catherines Island. After the War between the States many of these Negroes moved to White Bluff, built their homes, reared their families, and have lived to see two generations reach maturity. With all their fervent Christian doctrines the old people have an unwavering faith in many of the beliefs taught them by their grandparents. A few remember their ancestors who were brought from Africa on slave ships.

The younger group seem carefree as they perform their tasks in the cool part of the morning. It is not unusual to see several young men lying on a shady porch resting or happily engaged in a card game as early as ten o'clock on a summer morning. These young people have little faith in the practices of their elders, but they believe profoundly in the power of certain charms to affect luck and love.[8]

Having heard that Sophie Davis was one of the oldest persons in the community, we visited her and found her cordial in her reception. Sophie * does not know her exact age, but was eight at the time of the war. She is very short and very stout with gray hair and a very large smiling face. The day we saw her she wore a cotton print dress with gray predominating. Her sparkling eyes expressed her interest in current happenings of the community, and when she laughed, her eyes became mere slits and her shoulders shook.

Indicating a small bush growing beside the doorway of her little cabin, Sophie told us, "Some uh duh folks heah sho belieb in some queah tings. Yuh see dis lill bush—it call Cherokee an mos uh duh folks yuh plants it at duh doe. It bring um good luck.[34c] Lot uh medicine an cuos is made frum udduh roots and herbs an some uh duh folks uses um wen dey's sick." [48]

We inquired as to the kind of herbs used.

* *Sophie Davis, White Bluff.*

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skinned, proud, upstanding and loyal, suspicious of strangers but generous and trusting to friends (Plate VIII, IX, X). Most of the very old inhabitants have died in the past decade, so that to have reached the age of sixty places a man or woman in the patriarchal class. The grown people between twenty-five and thirty, are still close to the traditions and beliefs in which they have been reared. Firmly believing in the Bible, they still are aware of other beliefs and customs handed down by their parents and grandparents.

A pleasant, intelligent woman * of about forty-five chatted with us. "Cose, det is duh will ub God, but dey do say jis duh same wen a pusson die, 'Maybe somebody fix em'[15] aw 'I sho know dat uhmun wuz rooted.' I ain nebuh bought no powduh muhsef but jis day befo yestuhdy a uhmun frum Tatemville wuz right yuh tuh dis house sellin High John duh Conqueruh fuh fifty cent an she sho say it would bring yuh powuhful good luck, but I ain hab fifty cent.[9]

"Cose, it ain good tuh fool much wid dem tings, but yuh sho hab tuh be keahful not tuh let no enemy git hole uh yuh haiah combins cuz dey say dey sho could fix yuh den."[10] She laughed a little uneasily. "Ef yuh dream ub a snake dassa enemy neahby too, but ef yuh weah a snake skin roun yuh wais, it good fuh wut ail yuh.[504] * An ef uh enemy come tuh yuh house an yuh dohn wahn im deah no mo, yuh jis take duh bruhm an sweep out quick attuh im. Den sprinkle a lill salt on duh flo weah his foot track bin an sweep em all out duh doe an he sho wohn come back no mo."

At this point in her narrative a swarm of barefoot children, black and with shining eyes, clustered around us. One and all were eating crabs, biting into the soft part of the body shell or cracking a claw with strong white teeth. Word had evidently just gone out that some excitement was brewing. Strangers had come and were talking to "Miz Minnie." If anything was going on they didn't want to miss it.

* *Minnie Dawson, Pin Point.*

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Sandfly

SANDFLY, ABOUT NINE MILES SOUTHEAST OF SAVANnah, is a scattered Negro community spreading through the hot pine barrens to the Isle of Hope. There is nothing unusual or outstanding about the sleepy little settlement; its three hundred inhabitants appear to lead a placid, uneventful existence.

Many of the houses are situated on a side road which leads to the Isle of Hope. Modern conveniences are lacking, but the nondescript dwellings are brightened by flower gardens in the front yards, while small truck gardens occupy the space to the rear and sides. The more substantial houses of the more prosperous citizens are set deep in the wooded sections and are reached by means of narrow winding paths bordered with giant moss-hung oak trees.

Usually life in Sandfly flows along pleasantly and without serious interruption. Even in the morning men and women sit around on porches or in yards, sometimes talking, sometimes dozing in the sun. The more industrious are at work in the gardens or may be seen through doors busily occupied in washing or ironing clothes. Many of the men are employed as fishermen or day laborers, and the women who work out are generally engaged as house servants in homes at near-by Isle of Hope.

At first residents of the community were reluctant to talk about their superstitions and beliefs and their knowledge of conjure. Their customary response when first approached was a laconic, "No, ma'am, I ain got no fait in sech tings as

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cunjuh." When pressed for details, however, and when assured that the interviewers' interest was a friendly one, their attitude frequently changed and they talked volubly of queer happenings in the vicinity.

"They jis don't think bout nuthin but cunjuh," said one woman, a newcomer in the neighborhood.* "Yuh heah all the time of folks havin spells put on em an findin cunjuh bags buried in the yahd. All the times some folks are fixin othuhs.[15]

"A woman that lived in Homestead Park jis couldn't seem to have nothin but bad luck. She thought maybe an enemy had cunjuhed uh, so she looked in the yahd an sho nough theah wuz a cunjuh bag. It wuz a queah lookin bundle with a lot of brown clay in it. She destroyed the bag an the bad luck stopped an the evil spirits didn't bothuh uh none."

A small child complained to his parents that he felt snakes moving about in his head.[5, 50] A local doctor diagnosed the illness as ringworm, but this explanation failed to satisfy the parents for the child's own theory of snakes seemed to them much more convincing. One morning, soon after, the mother discovered a large snake crawling about in front of the house. She killed the snake and the next day the inflamed places on the boy's head began to heal. In a few days he was completely cured.**

Professional witch doctors and root doctors [48] ply an active trade and are employed in the more extreme cases, but often the people take matters in their own hands and by means of conjure bags and charms seek to alter their own destinies and those of their neighbors. Retribution is brought to bear on an enemy, the favor of a loved one is gained, and luck in business or in games of chance is assured by the possession of some sort of luck charm or powder.[9]

* *Lizzie Jenkins, Sandfly.*
That this informant came from another section of Georgia was reflected in her speech.
** *Ophelia Baker, Baker's Crossing*

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I knowd dat live neahby. I make em all walk home wid me, but deah wuzn no signs of duh lill man.

"Attuh dat lots of folks say dey see im. Wen duh moon is noo an deah is a drizzle, he come walkin along wid his lill lamp. He take all kine uh shapes. Sometime he's a man an sometime he's a animal.[54] Dey say he's comin roun cuz deah's buried treasure neah yuh." * [61]

Here in this little Negro community there seem to be few phases of life left untouched by superstitious fears. As one woman aptly expressed it—"Everything that happen is cause by cunjuh an magic. They jis dohn leave nuthin tuh Gawd." **

* *Lee Baynes, Sandfly.*
** *Lizzie Jenkins, Sandfly.*

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not only on the children but on the adults who often came to visit her as well. Many times the children sat with their eyes glued to her face or staring dazed into the fire, hypnotized by the slow, steady rhythm of her voice unfolding the bizarre events of her tale. At times, her voice became so low, and she paused so long, that some of the younger children stirred, and the older ones lashed out in anger at them for disturbing the chilling mood that had been created. In tales of hags, ghosts, and other strange happenings, the audience did not usually respond quickly as they did with other, less suspenseful, tales, primarily because topics such as these were not taken lightly by the islanders. Many are staunch believers in hags, ghosts, voodoo, and the occult. Thus tales of this kind were told not only for entertainment but to inform or to reaffirm the listeners' belief in the existence of these seen and unseen forces rampant throughout the islands and the universe.

Furthermore, such grave topics often had an aesthetic appeal somewhat different from that of funny or historical tales. The audience was not lively, loud, or as energetic as it would be when listening to the exploits of Ber Rabbit. Witty stories are deserving of spirited and excited responses. In listening to tales of the supernatural, the audience tended to be not only quiet but filled with awe and reverence, even more for one who knew of such things by firsthand experience than for the topic itself. There was some verbal interplay between Miss Deeley and her audience, but it was much more subdued than even in prayers and sermons. In prayers and sermons the audience is expected to participate openly in the event. People are free to speak as loud and become as verbally unrestrained as they want "when the spirit hits them." In listening to tales like Miss Deeley's, the audience was restrained both by the subject and by the speaker's use of a lowered, even whispered, tone to help create an eerie effect; many times the listeners had to strain to hear every word. As a result, most displays from the audience were in the form of low moans ("ummmm . . . uh") or an occasional "yeah, man," "shonuf so" or "where you de say you see em?" In these narratives—especially where a story was felt to have an actual basis in fact—the listeners' questions were not rhetorical, and the speaker took time out from the events of the tale to answer them.

Miss Deeley was one of the few informants who still included songs in some of the tales told. Songs are an inherent part of most West African stories, and of stories told throughout the Caribbean, because

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There is continuity, too, in the religious services. Worship is shared with others who appreciate the place of religious exercises in the traditional structure of beliefs and values. The services continue to be alive, energetic, and thoroughly enjoyable. Sermons and prayers are still passed on orally from one generation to the next, rather than written down. The sermons are delivered by ministers who are natives of the island area, who speak the language, and who value the old traditions.

Basketry and marketing remain important, for two reasons. They have economic significance, but pride has also become a factor. The children learning the basket traditions now are being told that the patterns they are weaving repeat not only the patterns woven by their grandparents but those of their African ancestors before them.

Fishing and netting continue to provide livelihoods for many, though they are endangered by development and pollution of the waters. The islanders are "river and ocean" people. They gauge their workdays by the sun and by the ebb and flow of the tides. Some continue to use the marsh mud to fertilize their gardens. Others go to the banks of the ocean recesses to sit, fish, and tell tales of Ber Rabbit, tales often so vivid that many of the children swear they have actually seen him bounding down the island paths. The fishing techniques and the love and respect for the ocean are being passed on to the children along with the tales, myths, lies, and legends of island life.

The folklore and literature of the Sea Islands, unsurprisingly, are more alive on the remote islands than on the more commercialized ones. Though television, with its cartoon characters and talking pictures, is an arch rival for even the most gifted teller, on stormy days and dark, gloomy nights no one is permitted to watch television because the islanders believe that it draws electricity and increases the possibility that their homes could be struck by lightning. During these times the children are gathered and told tales of Ber Rabbit, hants, ghosts, witches, and hags, and no television program can hold an audience as spellbound as some of the island storytellers.

Gullah, the island language, is being affected by population changes, television, and the schools. Children are seldom named after days of the week any more, but most are still given two names: one to use at school and one to use at home. Many of the words familiar to the older generations are not being passed on to the children because the islanders, like most parents, want their children to attain good educa-

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114 sociological bias reflected in the "white-to-black" method of interpreting African-American culture. Willie Lee Rose's *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, written in 1964, is a fine work which demonstrates the early Reconstruction era and the problems African-Americans faced as new citizens. Yet Rose's book discusses the land question and Northern "missionaries" more than Gullah culture, which we only glimpse. More recently, Charles Joyner has written a historical recreation of the Gullah rice community, All Saints on the Waccamaw River. Using interdisciplinary techniques, Joyner offers a detailed reconstruction of daily life in this Georgetown District plantation society. Our works are similar in that we attempt to express historical appreciation of Gullah culture, and we make use of similar sources. Beyond that, our books differ considerably, especially in terms of focus, themes, structure, and style.[19]

121 All who went among the Gullahs were struck by the significance of religion in nearly every aspect of their social and cultural existence. Yet 791 no writer has attempted to characterize or interpret, from a cultural perspective, the spiritual components of Gullah life. This study represents such an effort. It has been a thought-provoking, engrossing study of social cohesion. In addition to considerations of a historical nature, this book was embarked upon because of a deep, subjective interest in the Gullahs and their fascinating example of group identity, adaptability, and black resistance on a militant and cultural level. I hope the book offers a useful means of discerning, capturing, and understanding the phenomenon that characterized and gave vitality to their spiritual and communal life.

175 No event polarized public opinion on the issue of religious instruction of slaves in South Carolina more than the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy of 1822. This attempt by Charleston slaves to "make a desperate struggle to recover their rights" was planned in the large African Methodist Church in that city. The incident created two well-defined and opposing views regarding religious instruction. On the one hand, panic-stricken Carolinians insisted that religious instruction of the slaves cease altogether. Yet others calmly counseled that if religion played a role at all in the Conspiracy, it was either a misguided interpretation of Christianity, inspired by Northern clergymen infiltrating the South, or was the result of "superstitious," "primitive" notions taught by native Africans. Some within this latter group argued that not only was it the *duty* of planters and

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ture, the long march, and the Middle Passage. Later discussion on Gullah folk religion will offer interpretations of how functional and ritualistic features of Poro-Sande Societies specifically, and other initiation rites generally, may have merged with Gullah versions of Christianity. This was especially apparent in that Gullah folk religion served as a cultural and community building force and a means of instilling individual self-worth among bondspeople.

Religion and Order in Traditional Society

171

Both Islamic and traditional African religions, similar to Christian spiritual belief, adhered to a kind of monotheism. For non-Moslem Africans the Supreme Being or Sky God had many names. Akan-Ashanti referred to God as *Onyame*. Bantu peoples called God *Nzambi*. Among the Mende God was *Ngewo* and to the Gola *Daya*. The Supreme Deity was generally considered omniscient, omnipotent, and creator of all life. God represented the highest values—kindness, justice, sincerity, and mercy. Thus in African perceptions, God was no fomenter of mischief or ill will. Unlike Jehovah, God was not to be feared, and no prayers needed to be offered. Evil came from other sources, not the Creator. Although God was not accorded worship through libation and was invisible, allegiance was rendered, and the Deity's ultimate power over humans was recognized. "Nzambi possesses us and eats us," or "he is gone, Nzambi has willed it," were central themes in some BaKongo proverbs and songs.[13]

Belief in afterlife was integral to traditional African religion. But Africans did not view the future world with fear, nor, as in Christianity, as a place of dispensations for rewards and punishments in a strict sense. In this land of the dead where life continued, there was no sickness, disease, poverty, or hunger. But underworld inhabitants retained the positions of their earthly hierarchy. Death was a journey into the spirit world, not a break with life or earthly beings. The idea of the perpetuity of life through time, space, and circumstance was common to African religious culture, and the complexity of this belief system is typified by BaKongo cosmology and concepts of the four moments of the sun. Using the sun through its course around the earth, the BaKongo pointed out the four stages which make up one's life cycle: (1) rising—meaning birth, beginning, or regrowth, (2) ascendency—meaning maturity and responsibility, (3) setting—implying death and transformation, (4) midnight,

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nance.[18] The absence of mandatory secret societies as a means of maintaining corporate linkage and community loyalty points up the significance of kinship and lineage in a monarchial system such as that practiced by peoples of the Kongo region. Clan loyalty was paramount. If *Nzambi* ruled, reproved, and in the final analysis ordered the world according to divine design, ancestors superintended, rewarded, and welcomed the dead into their subterranean village. Ritually, BaKongo spiritual behavior was concatenated to ancestor devotion, not to *Nzambi*, though the spirit world consisted of forces unleashed by *Nzambi*. Among the most powerful of these were deceased elders of the clan, called *bakulu*—white spirits who roamed the earth (in woods, streams, and villages) and resided in the subterranean "world of no evil." Vital to ancestor reverence was the belief that discarnate human spirits maintain interest in their people after passing to the unseen society where they guard traditions and activities of the living. If family herds were squandered, ancestors took note and punished. If drought threatened the family herds, old chiefs in the spirit world might take pity and send rain. The power of ancestral spirits was commonly recognized.[19]

Belief in ancestoral spirits, in life after death, and in the significance of that future life gave funeral and burial rites a central place in African existence. Sick-bed attendance and a fitting send-off were essential observations of this rite of passage. Death halted routine activities when marriage or other rites did not. Failure to properly observe the death ritual could either implicate one in that death, or bring ill will to the erring clan member. The curse of the dying was much dreaded. In the American South, as noted by Herskovits, Bastide, Thompson, and others, black cemeteries represent a special historical relic. For here one finds the clearest, strongest visible examples of memories of African-inspired customs. African reverence for departed members of the family and group remained a factor in Gullah religious life even after they accepted Christianity. Gullah regard for deceased family members could not have equalled the homage paid to these spirits by Old World or "New" Africans. Still, spirits of the dead had to be reckoned with, and slaves believed they took the form of either good or evil supernatural forces. Vengeful spirits of the dead were those wronged during their lifetime, or "on easy" spirits perhaps indicating bewitchment, or they were the ancestors of outside families or groups. Hence in keeping with

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their traditional African heritage, Gullahs employed various means of pacification of the living dead, seemingly more derived from Bantu influence.[20]

Supernatural causation of suffering, disease, accidents, death under obscure circumstances, and other misfortunes was a core of African thought. Magic and medicine were employed for protection and healing. The use of sacred medicines called *minkisi* (singl. *nkisi*) was, along with ancestor reverence, fundamental to religion among Bantu peoples who lacked a complex system of lesser deities possessed for instance by the Yoruba peoples. Although *Nzambi* allowed death to come to humankind, the Deity also armed the people with *minkisi*. Minkisi power derived from two classes of medicine. They contained "spirit-embodying" (earth from a grave site for instance) and "spirit-admonishing" objects (seeds, claws, miniature knives, stones). Hence the basis of *nkisi* life source was a "captured soul," "spirit controlled by a man," and the charm's owner directed the spirit of the object to accomplish certain things.[21]

Medicine specialists, priests, and priestesses were, like ancestors, significant spiritual intermediaries. They were the great healers, or practitioners of "white magic" often symbolized by adornment with white chalk. Medicine specialists, called *nganga* by the BaKongo, discerned the cause of illness, holocaust, or unhappiness, discovered the culprit, and prescribed treatment and a means of preventing recurrence of the calamity. Since afflictions and misfortune were the workings of "black magic," called *kindoki* in KiKongo, diviners employed miraculous as well as herbal healing elements in their profession. As combatants of evil and antisocial behavior, they interceded spiritually with the supernatural and in some societies instructed patients regarding which ancestors or minor deities to approach for defensive and preventive measures. John Mbiti, an East African theologian and scholar, has offered a general synthesis of the African specialists' practice:

> The medicine man is in effect both doctor and pastor to the sick person. His medicines are made from plants, herbs, powders, bones, seeds, roots, juices, leaves, liquids, minerals, charcoal and the like; and in dealing with a patient, he may apply massages, needles or thorns, and he may bleed the patient; he may jump over the patient, he may use incantations and ventriloquism, and he may ask the patient to perform various things like sacrificing a chick or goat, observing some taboos or avoiding certain foods and persons—all these are in addition to giving the patient physical medicines.[22]

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guiding potential Christian converts through the "seekin' " experience just as Poro and Sande leaders conducted the neophytes through the "bush" experience.[25]

A second group of leaders worked on the periphery of Christianity. These "doctors" or "conjurers" were highly regarded by Africans and by African-Americans tied to their past while also creating a present. Some resembled the African specialists, in Kikongo the *nganga*, practitioners of *minkisi*. Yet others practiced *kindoki*, and brought evil. For if *Nzambi* and the ancestors set the limits of human possibility, and gave humans countermeasures against catastrophic forces, this influence was not always successful. The sorcerer *ndoki* brought chaos, disorder, sterilization of nature, and even death. Hence we fine among the Gullahs the belief in conjuration and in witches of human form who brought evil via mystical actions, and in root "doctors" and healers who worked for the forces of good.

As Christianity crusaded through the slave quarters during the last generation bondage, another type of major leadership is identified as having a commanding influence upon the Gullahs. These plantation meeting house elders, chosen by whites, were the last group to develop. As spiritual parents, root doctors, and conjurers were a bridge between old and new traditions, with accentuation of the former, the "praise house watchmen" were the embodiment of creative forces that congealed past and present into something exceptional. But the new leadership, unlike the old, was probably more definitely in alignment with the new religion. Still black elders were pillars of strength in the slave quarters, and often above reproach among the members of the socioreligious communities.[26]

Association with African traditions obviously weakened, first in wake of new circumstances and later due to the power and appeal of the new religion. Yet while many elements of Africanity disappeared, other beliefs and customs took on new forms. Some features basic to traditional experience and thought outlived the capture, homeland enslavement, Middle Passage, and Protestant influence. African religious orientation was fundamental to early ethnic groups brought to the Sea Islands and coastal Lowcountry. Additionally, in the process of community-building, a cosmology significant in traditional African societies formed another basis of the Gullah world view and spirituality. A sacred concept of reality and of the universe not only explained natural and supernatural phenomena for Africans, but fashioned notions about human relation-

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ships as well. The ontological[27] category of traditional African societies, and which also formed the basis of the Gullah world view, was the fusion of spirituality with human activity and the impact of a sacred presence in all areas of life. Spirituality was a main element of culture, integrating and coordinating other aspects of communal behavior. Such a pattern, so deterministic to group attitudes in West African society, was difficult to obliterate especially among a people so completely defined out of the new social and cultural structure into which they were thrust.

West African world view was consonant with the idea that in a cohesive and integrated community each member had a place. In colonial Kongo whites tended to assume that individualism was absent from black behavior, and attributed to Africans a "Bantu mentality," completely different from "European mentality." As one author noted, this was a rationalization for despotism over Africans. Wyatt MacGaffey maintains that a "purely dogmatic" assumption of some scholars led to insistence that the individual is not differentiated from the collective or clan. One solution, writes MacGaffey, is to distinguish between "true individualism," a commendable trait among the BaKongo, and "egocentrism" which was deplorable. Additionally, MacGaffey sees a difference between progressive "civilized collectivism" and primitive forms of collectivity, the latter stagnating a society. These insights explain much about traditional African society. Certainly Africans had civil, structured communities in which individual activity was forged with collective necessity. Traditional African spiritualism was an individual as well as collective experience. It encompassed the total well-being of the community, but each person had a role in society, guided by spiritual forces. In this sense, religion for Africans and Gullahs, whether essentially traditional or Christian, was a total immersion phenomenon. The sacred was not set apart from temporal, individual, communal, material, or even political concerns, and religion assumed a meaning outside of a "holy" building, a "sacred" day of the week, or a set of dogmas and creeds to be accepted at face-value. In traditional African philosophy, spiritual elan affected one's whole system of being, embracing feelings, social interactions, values, fears, and the disposition of the community at large. John Mbiti succinctly expresses this consciousness:

> . . . in traditional society there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, to do so is to be severed from his

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roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society.[28]

Viewed in this light, the power of Poro-Sande, of the ancestors, and of *minkisi* were key unifying socioreligious forces. Each was effective because of divine supernatural intervention which demanded individual and group propriety. God gave Upper Guinea peoples Poro-Sande, gave *minkisi* to the BaKongo, and transformed the ancestors into spiritual guardians. Hence God was not only a Supreme Spirit but a lawgiver as well. The supernatural existence of Poro-Sande was thus ordained and the pantheon of Poro-Sande spirits, through association with God, decreed laws, set standards, modes of behavior, worship, and customs. The "captured spirit" in each *nkisi* was incarnated power sent directly from *Nzambi* (similar perhaps to the Christian Holy Ghost). Ancestors were the emissaries of the withdrawn Supreme Deity. This idea of the remoteness of God, noted by writers and observers, is disputed by some recent African scholars. Still both sides of the debate acknowledge the presence of a Supreme Deity in African spiritual concepts, and that God had agents through which divine will was dispensed. This provided a linkage of spiritual virtue with communal responsibility. The attributes of God (discussed earlier), corresponded with characteristics of harmony and social order, the antithesis of bush living which was a wild, antisocial state of consciousness. Similarly, Gullahs who accepted Christianity associated community socialization with religious piety. The laws of God were synonomous with correct conduct toward other members of the slave quarters. In maintaining this African socioreligious connection in the American ambiance, bondspeople operated on an internal logic that excluded planters, overseers, and even white Christian ministers. There was a parallel between the structural configuration of what became Gullah folk religion and composition of social order in the quarters. Thus in Gullah antebellum communities their interpretations of spirituality played a major role in attitudes toward collective accountability.[29]

African codes of ethics stemmed from spiritual orientation. Moral defects were considered spiritual flaws in traditional society and a blight on one's character. Individuals were expected to be guided by ethics characteristic of God, the ultimate source of moral order. Patriarchs, diviners, ancestors, and other spirits that one met in the sacred grove

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of the spirit world were guardians of life. They were appealed to when illness, environmental disaster, or the malice of wrongdoers jeopardized the life force. Often they were placated in the interim as a precautionary measure, always with the end being the perserverance of the individual, the clan and village, and the group. The underlying and perhaps most dynamic force operative in the development of a religion among the Gullahs was rooted in these processes. In some respects, African traditional religion was complimented by certain Christian beliefs. But it was mainly a pristine element of sacred thought that remained with the slaves and accounted for the vitality of African-American culture and creation of an African-American ethos. It was a spirituality which represented a zealous affirmation and celebration of life, that did not separate sacred from secular responsibility, and that placed community above individual interests without completely sacrificing personhood. The effects of this broader guiding African influence on Gullah religion explain their striving and motivation in maintaining, within the realm of bondage, a reason for being. Spiritual causation was one of the few means available in their attempts to fulfill needs, interpret experience, and articulate the expectations of an emerging people. This, along with practical and applied examples of Christianity, formed the basis of Gullah folk religion. Yet the process of socioreligious community formation was slow, traumatic, and filled with pitfalls. In the early years there were problems of cultural alienation on both sides. Even later, whites were not generally anxious to include the masses of African-Americans into the Protestant spiritual ethos. Nor were Gullahs exactly bursting with enthusiasm for a religion whose doctrines supposedly ordained their foreign bondage. This polarization lessened, for whites realized benefits in adopting an *unequal* spiritual coexistence, and Gullahs decided the new religion could be interpreted on a number of levels.

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Dis berry same Jesus, dis berry same Jesus,
We heares dese people de talk about;
Dis berry same Jesus . . .

Chreitzberg finished his labors and headed back to Beaufort by boat. Undoubtedly the black boatmen had heard his sermon. It was a dark night and the effect of the scene was heightened by "one of those thundergusts, so frequent in our latitudes." Chreitzberg and his associate sat at the stern of the boat, comfortably "gazing at the clouds." The lightening gleamed in the distance, "with the sullen roll of the distant thunder":

We were sitting at ease in the stern of the boat, suddenly a sound struck upon our ear, that we can liken to nothing save the shriek of a lost spirit. This we found to be the chorus of a song the boat hands were preparing to sing, the chorus we cannot write; it was something between a groan and the cry,—"have mercy"; and was sung at the end of every line.

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O Lord, O Lord! what shall we do?
What shall we do, what shall we do?
What shall we do for a hiding place;
No hiding place for sinner here.
We run to de sea—de sea run dry;
We run to de rock—de rock da sink;
We run to de tree—de tree ketch fire;
We run to de grave—de grave bus open;
We run to de door—de door shut close;
We wring we hands, we grine we feet,
We cry O Lord, O Lord, O Lord,
No hidin' place for sinner here!

The words written, may only serve to excite a smile, but when sung, the effect is directly the reverse; as in the intensity of excitement, one holds his breath to catch every intonation of the voice; he will, in spite of himself, be affected to tears.[65]

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The Gullahs sense of their own human frailty was expressed in their spirituals. Illness, floggings, fatigue from overwork, and the ubiquity of death were features of daily existence. The harsh Sea Island bondage must have contributed to a longing for a better world at best or for another one at the very least. For some slaves an eternal reward would justify a life that was often painful and joyless yet not without hope. Some conscious rationale regarding a future being might ease a portion of the strong sense of injustice felt toward the present, and fill gaps left

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by features of traditional African religion and philosophy not transferable or appliable to the New World situation. In this way the Gullahs gradually developed a holistic religion with components of both experiences. The helplessnss implicit in the Christian motif was a central ingredient of Methodist teaching. But one need not seek an explanation for identification with Christianity in Methodism alone, with its prostrating sense of fatalism. Aside from biblical example, and need for a complete world view, the Gullahs' own ill-fated lives and the frequent occurrence of untimely deaths were often sufficient to bring forth the poetry from within. The following Sea Island torchlight burial is an example of the kind of tragic scene that might well motivate the creation of a spiritual:

> On one occasion of burial, I have reason to believe much good was done. A woman, who was a member of the Church, and who had died in full hope of immortal life, was to be buried at night, it being the most convenient time for the people to be together. Accordingly I met the people at the time appointed. The plantation being large, many were present. The corpse was conveyed about a quarter of a mile to the burial ground, the procession moving slowly and silently along, with lighted torches interspersed through the ranks. This presented a solemn scene; but after we arrived at the burying place it was still more solemn. A grove standing in the midst of a large clearing, which had been sacredly kept for years as belonging to the dead, undisturbed even by the footsteps of man, except when another was to be laid in the earth, and under the shade of the cedars. Here we all met in the midst of the grove, around the grave. It was a dark night, but in the midst of the grove it was still more dark. All was silent, except the thrilling note of the whippoorwill, who had made this lonely retreat its home; all around us lay the graves of the dead of all sizes. The reflection from many torches presented them full in view in every direction, as though they had but just been closed; so thick was the shade above that no grass grew on that spot. I have attended many of my fellow beings to the grave; but never did I witness a more solemn time, and yet I felt it a blessed time. I felt it a duty to try and improve the occasion of our being together; and indeed it was a time of weeping—some of the most stubborn were melted into tears. The husband of the deceased and her infant child were near the grave; he, before a careless man, now wept aloud—and since that period has shown his grief was not of a worldly kind; he has offered himself to the Church, and his child he has had baptized. Many others on the plantation have become serious, and are now on trial.[66]

The spectacle of this young woman's funeral and the presence of the white missionary preaching the prospect of life after death aroused thoughts of the finality of human life and generated desires to transcend reality and be projected into a peaceful future existence. More than likely a

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175 764 533 burial scene such as the one above prompted the creation of a most poignant Gullah spiritual. It was recorded during the Civil War by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Commander of the First South Carolina Volunteers. He considered it "the most poetic of all their songs."

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I know moon-rise, I know star-rise;
Lay dis body down.
I walk in de moonlight, I walk in de starlight
To lay dis body down.
I'll walk in de graveyard, I'll walk through de graveyard,
To lay dis body down.
I'll lie in de grave and stretch out my arms;
Lay dis body down.
I go to de Judgment in de evinin' ob de day
When I lay dis body down.
And my soul and your soul will meet in de day
When I lay dis body down.[47]

175 771 797 567 Certainly Gullahs wanted to believe in a bondless futurity, and many accepted assurances of the missionaries, if not their discipline. Undoubtedly, a number of Gullahs felt that their existence on earth offered so little and mortal doom was so certain that nothing was gambled by adopting Christianity. Their imaginations and aspirations were quickened by inspiring parables, stimulating renditions of undeserved agonies of the long-suffering man-god, his earthly demise, and ultimate triumphant rebirth. The parallels were clearly hard to resist.

Thus it might appear that the hopes and expectations of planters such as C. C. Pinckney were realized—that as professors of Christianity, slaves resigned themselves to their circumstances in return for the hope of a heavenly future. Yet it is a mistake to interpret the Gullahs' acceptance of some Christian teachings as a reflection of negative attitudes toward earthly life. Nor did such teachings instill a sense of futility and resignation. Christianity as interpreted by the slaves did not induce them to disavow the present as much as it served to mitigate the inhumane features of their existence as slaves. For the Gullahs, Christianity was a spiritual release from anxieties, frustrations, and animosities, providing a frame of reference to understand their position as bondspeople. In this sense the religion of the slaveholders was diluted, becoming for the slaves a source of strength embodied in their use of Christian ideology as a personification of their will to freedom. Major emphasis of slave religion was not "otherworldly." What Gullahs accepted in Christianity did not

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prevent the kind of defensive acts which the planters anticipated would cease. Flight, theft, and reluctance to labor were means of undermining plantation order and were acts of resistance that continued to plague planters although more and more blacks became "converted."[68] True, they did not rise in revolt. Memories of the consequences of failed rebellion attempts and strong kinship ties encouraged another type of resistance involving less individual risk while creating more collective energy. The goal after all was freedom. Doctrines of the New Testament exposed the Gullahs to a kind of freedom in a spiritual sense but also upheld their right to physical liberty and equality.

Gullah reaction to Christianity under Methodist tutelage was complex. On the one hand, the slaves responded to the warmth and tolerance demonstrated by missionaries. Acts of sincerity and kindness induced the slaves to take an interest in Methodist teachings. Once Gullahs applied Christianity to their own daily lives, they grasped how its tenets could, in some ways, reflect the nature of their experiences as a people. On the other hand, the paradox inherent in Christian teaching as presented by the Methodists did not escape them. Gullahs rejected doctrines instructing them to be dutiful and obedient to slave masters, but embraced the teachings about the suffering of Christ, the resurrection, and the impartiality of a future judge who would right past wrongs. One finds no evidence of spirituals applauding an obedient slave, admonishing a disobedient one, or warning a slave against the retribution extracted by God for "crimes" against a slave master. The benne seed ritual evinced just the opposite implication. Contrary to the planter's desire, slaves did not fear "another tribunal," and as "Christians," continued stealing corn and rice, burning cotton, and fleeing to the swamps and marshes. If anything, the introduction of Christianity among the Gullahs enhanced their justification for deploring the system of bondage, and provided sound arguments for what was sensed all along—the equality of humankind.

The strongest reaction against Methodism existed because of the cultural barrier between missionaries and Gullahs. Although early white Methodism accepted emotional expressions as signs of godliness, missionaries among the Gullahs emphasized a primarily stodgy instructional approach to Christianity. Methodists permitted and applauded the emotional outpourings characterizing Gullah spirituals, but other physical manifestations were often viewed as "ungodly." Missionaries noted that

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from Baptist and Episcopalian masters, and limited contact with black preachers.

The Methodists' systematic religious instruction provided Gullahs with the first opportunity for a uniform type of religious culture. This socio-religious nexus did not vary from plantation to plantation or from island to island. It was based on a moral philosophy, not precluding the preservation to some extent of a continued faith in the customs of African-born forebears. The emerging religious association resembled and gave expression to a world view brought from Africa, common to the Gullahs, and suited to their circumstances. More than any other features of the Christian religion, the Gullahs embraced its moral virtues—humanity, humility, fairness, a sense of the dignity of the sufferer, and belief in the merit of all people. No matter how one regards these values, they are celebrated in Christianity, and it was this spirit in Methodist teachings that the Gullahs accepted. The letter of the law, in a strict Mosaic form, and the Pauline sanction of servitude were rejected. There was little room for internalization of the dogma present in Christianity as taught by whites. That would have negated Gullahs' previous belief patterns and their hatred of bondage. Gullah folk Christianity was an ardently felt religion. It was a religion which elevated them above their masters' efforts to make them contented slaves. Far more than Methodism perhaps, Gullah folk religion was a religion of the heart. Their spirituality helped them channel what was expected to be hopelessness, helplessness, and prostration into the forging and further enrichment of a culture. Through individual stamina, collective faith, and cultural development they merged as a people. Their collective faith kept them spiritually free in spite of physical bondage. Their collective faith, together with spiritual freedom, and matched with natural gifts and talents, provided Gullahs with a will to create, the courage to persevere, and power, as a "prepolitical" people, to use religion as a progressive force and shield against white psychological and cultural domination. This collective faith allowed them to believe in themselves and in their dream of ultimate freedom.[71]

The year 1845 was momentous for the history of slave conversion in South Carolina and for the nation as a whole. At that time the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Southern Baptist Convention were organized. Both denominations pledged to make a more zealous thrust in Christian instruction of the black population. Also, in May of that year,

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him for many years insisted that his "wisdom" and "vision" were "God's free gift" for a service of faith and hope that "Prophet" Polite had rendered his people. In old age, as a free man, he addressed the Praise House congregation probably the same way he did on other occasions throughout the years after slavery. The words of Sam Polite demonstrates that the Gullahs, in freedom as in bondage, viewed their religion as a special gift with a unique essence:

> God done gib de white folks a heap of things, but he ain't forgotten us 'cause He gib us Religion and we have a right to show it out to all de world. De Buckra [white people], deys got de knowing of the whys and hows of religion, but dey ain't never got de feel of it yet. I think God ain't have much respect for no kind of religion without de feeling. De Book say, 'They that worship me must worship me in spirit and in truth.' There might be some truth in deys-all religion, but there ain't much spirit in a religion that's all in de head.[1]

The Gullahs' capacity to maintain psychological and spiritual autonomy in the face of degrading implications of their historical circumstances was usually attributed to their faith. The ostensible basis of this faith was Christianity. Certainly one source of Gullah religion and spirituality is found in Christian example, enabling them to see their enslavement in heroic terms. Yet Gullah roots sprang from an African world view that emphasized affirmation and celebration of human life, with religion representing the highest expression of that existence. Additionally, their African heritage familiarized Gullahs with the power and supremacy of a collective spirit over individual experience. Thus, while planters valued religious instruction as a means of manipulating the actions and thinking of Gullahs, the slaves' discretionary adoption and adaptation of certain features of Christianity was a way of articulating and manifesting their common oppression in terms significant for them and also either acceptable or esoteric to slaveholders and missionaries.

Most Gullahs cared little about didactic features fundamental to Christianity. And while their exposure to the religion was primarily superficial, their acceptance and reinterpretation was essentially practical, reinforcing older traditions. Their limited understanding of Protestantism was observed by antebellum travelers and Methodist missionaries right up to the time of civil conflict. Aptitude had nothing to do with the Gullahs' failure to grasp a firmer knowledge of Protestantism. They shrewdly did what was expected of them without actually internalizing

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doctrine. When given the opportunity, they fashioned their own religion. For instance, slaves in the wealthy coastal parish on the Waccamaw peninsula had the atypical experience of receiving, from about 1835 to 1861, very concerted Christian instruction. The rector of All Saints Episcopal Church at Waccamaw was Alexander Glennie of England, who, with several assistants, spent thirty-three years preaching and teaching bondspeople on numerous plantations. Glennie's parish and church were showplaces of the Carolina Coast whenever planters and Southern clergymen wanted to demonstrate how fully they were meeting the spiritual needs of their "people." Glennie himself published a popular book of sermons designed especially for slaves. Hundreds of Gullahs were communicants at All Saints, and "thousands of colored children recited the catechism, intelligently." Observers were impressed with Glennie's effectiveness:

> He has been with them so long and is such an amiable kind man that the negroes love him very much and his example has as much influence over them as his preaching. We all went to the negro church one P.M. . . . the congregation responsed and sang the Te Deum with Mr. G. . . . . When he preached he would go on a while, then stop and ask them questions about what he had gone over and they answered very well.

Yet after the Civil War, returning residents witnessed what they termed "religious deterioration" among the former slaves:

> Chapels were taken over by the negroes and soon resounded with barbaric shouting, the accompaniment of the debased Christianity of the emancipated slave. . . . They have forsaken the way which they had learned, and taken to themselves teachers of their own color. Fanaticism and extravagance rule in their assemblies. . . . There are indications of a return to African barbarism.[2]

During the Yankee occupation, representatives of the American Missionary Association noted that Gullahs were a "religious people," easily inspired to sing and pray profusely. Jesus was "a common theme in their conversation." But observers also noted that Gullahs knew little of "practical religion." Northern teachers commented on how quickly Gullah children memorized their school lessons. Yet the children's knowledge of religion was strangely confused with the current events in which they were caught up. One teacher, after "plainly" explaining to a Sunday School class of large boys the origin of the Ten Commandments and

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how they were given to Moses, then asked the children who wrote the Ten Commandments. She received such answers as "Uncle Sam," "General Saxby" (referring to General Rufus Saxton, Commander of the Department of the South), and "Columbus." On another occasion, a group of students were quizzed by officers in General Sherman's army. The question "Children, who is Jesus Christ?" was at first received with "paralyzed silence." Finally, a small boy loudly ventured, "General Saxby sar." An older boy responsed by giving his classmate "a vigorous thrust in the back" and proclaiming, 'Not so, boy! Him's Massa Linkum."[3] So much for the effectiveness of Methodist catechism and Baptist Sunday School.

Yet the children were heard singing of Jesus constantly. Even at school children consistently sang such "spirituals" as the following:

> Patrol around me. Tank God he no ketch me
> O Lord, yes my Lord
> .....
> In de mornin' when I rise,
> Tell my Jesus Huddy oh, . . .
> .....
> I would not let you go, my Lord,
> I would not let you go,
> .....
> I can't stay behin' my Lord,
> I can't stay behin'[4]

Even adult knowledge of Christianity was severly limited despite their attraction to "things of the spirit." One example was their attitude toward Christmas. Although the Gullahs revered Jesus, few understood the significance of Christmas, the day of Christ's birth. Still it was a joyous season, viewed in slavery primarily as a rare occasion, when fresh meat was allocated, labor ceased for two or three days, and possibly a new suit of clothing was received. Mary Ames taught among the Gullahs on Edisto and Wadmalaw Islands where Methodism was reportedly particularly effective. Yet Ames expressed surprise that the people knew so little of the life of Christ, "not knowing even of his birth." But, she related, "they are all familiar with his sayings." Elizabeth Botume, a Hilton Head teacher, remembered one jubilant Christmastime among the Sea Island "Contrabands," when she was asked to preach:

> I replied that there was but one sermon fitting for the occasion, and I read the whole of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, first explaining to them the meaning of

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the evergreens, typical of Christ's life and teachings. They gave breathless attention to all this, ejaculating from time to time, "My Lord! is dat so?"
I know now they understood very little of all I said, but no speaker ever had more interested and attentive listeners. When I sat down, one of the leaders chanted rather than spoke a touching prayer, in which he styled me his "dear imperial preacher."
Then the white friends sang,—"Joy to the world, the Lord has come."
By this time the entire audience was aroused and ready to pray and sing all night. In each prayer the speaker tried to introduce, in his uncouth phraseology, some of the passages of Scripture he had heard read.[5]

Though lacking a basic background regarding the teachings and historical importance of Christ, Gullahs strongly identified with his suffering, crucifixtion, and resurrection. This, to them, was Christianity, and since they felt their earthly lives so closely paralleled that of Jesus, becoming "Christians" was for Gullahs somewhat of an apocalyptic fulfillment. In fact, much of the essence of their understanding of Protestant religion centered around Jesus and His followers. Other writers have suggested that African-American slaves saw themselves primarily in the same light as the Children of Israel. This association certainly inspired some of the Charleston rebels in 1822, as already discussed. Also, the commander of Gullah troops, Thomas Higginson, stated that the men's memories were a "vast, bewildered chaos of Jewish history and biography," and that most great events from the past, up to "the American Revolution, they instinctively attributed to Moses." How the experience of the Jews aroused the Gullahs was witnessed by a Civil War missionary:

Last week I read to the *church full* the account of the escape of the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. I was amazed at the impression it seemed to make. The remarks the old men made were graphic and eloquent. It made them recount with praise to God their escape. The little church seemed like dreamland to me almost when they got stirred to talk.[6]

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Yet most Gullahs conceptualization of Christianity centered on the experiences of Jesus rather than the Jews, as is evident in their songs, prayers, and conversations. The militant nationalism so strongly associated with the Jewish struggle was a prominent ideology of Christian-oriented slaves during the Vesey Conspiracy but was not a major orientation in Gullah religion. Instead, as far as Christianity was concerned, Gullahs relied on a conviction that a moral wrong had been committed

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175 against them, as against Christ, and the transgression would ultimately
771 be rectified. Not that they refused to struggle against bondage, but rather
779 the Gullahs actively expressed their resistance and opposition through cultural tenacity, collective strength, a deep identification with Christ, and a conviction that with Him they had a covenant of freedom.

In any case, Christianity largely contributed to helping Gullahs consciously find a reason for being, and much of what they embraced in that religion conformed to this purpose. Thus, while it was difficult for them to grasp the concept behind the Ten Commandments, the story of the Jews being led out of Egypt could be easily internalized. More significantly, although intellectual perceptions of Jesus Christ caused some problems, and Gullahs did not totally comprehended the words of the Sermon on the Mount, nevertheless they saw their wordly existence as closely harmonizing with that of Christ's. They, as a people, were very much within the philosophical drift of the Sermon.

The Gullahs earnestness and simplicity in matters of religion left little room for doctrinal trappings that made Protestantism a religion fashioned to suit the needs of various social groups within Anglo-European society. From the teachings of Methodists and Baptists, Gullahs critically extracted that which gave meaning to their life-struggle, often devising novel interpretations of Christianity. The example of Christ provided uniqueness to their oppression since he too was a great sufferer. The comparison encouraged them to persevere because he was also the embodiment of a life-giving symbol. A ninety-two-year-old former slave
175 recounted the experience of her mother, who along with her five children
771 was sold away from their plantation. The mother was in a very dis-
787 traught state when a man, "white and shining" appeared with whom she
567 had the following dialogue:

> "Sarah, Sarah, Sarah!"
> "Yes Sir."
> "What is you fretin' bout so?"
> "Sir, I'm a stranger here, parted from my husband, with five little children and not a morsel of bread."
> "You say you're parted from your husband? You're not parted from your husband. You're jest over a little slash of water. Suppose you had to undergo what I had to. I was nailed to the Cross of Mount Calvary. And I am here today. Who do you put your trust in?"[7]

175 The observations of black Northern teacher Charlotte Forten provide
771 a further example. Forten was a frequent visitor at the Praise House and
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witnessed the Gullahs' spiritual enthusiasm at these meetings. She noticed an old blind man, Maurice, who led the singing with a remarkable voice, and sang with special forcefulness the favorite "New Jerusalem." According to Forten, his voice rang out "a glad, triumphal sound," but Maurice's story was a tragic one:

> His blindness was caused by a blow on the head from a loaded whip. He was struck by his master in a fit of anger. "I feel great distress when I become blind," said Maurice; "but den I went to seek de Lord; and ebber since I know I see in de next world, I always hab great satisfaction."[8]

Undoubtedly the pathos was eased somewhat by the Gullahs' rationalization that no matter how painful life was, someone had endured more than they, by their belief in the efficacy of salvation, and their expectation of immortality. Also, a great source of sustenance and faith in themselves derived from the Gullahs' presumption that they, like Christ, were historically guiltless. Gullahs reportedly possessed a "piety" of the heart. And they displayed an intuitive knowledge of the moral teachings of Christianity based upon practical experience, the socioreligious influence of African religion, and their own sense of collective survival.

Northern missionaries and teachers were impressed with how much Gullah religious expressions "sparkle with rich genius." Their belief in the noble nature of their circumstances helped to inspire creative inclinations. Gullahs called themselves a "peculiar people," and the words of an old Baptist deacon, recorded by Laura Towne, poignantly illustrate their communal spirituality. After planters deserted the Islands, Gullahs were compelled by Yankees to continue working in the cotton fields, often for little or nothing. Bondspeople wanted to cultivate provisions for their families, and just as the Gullahs were beginning to trust some white Northerners, another calamity befell them. In May 1862, Gullah men were, at bayonet point, conscripted into the Union Army by General David Hunter. The Gullahs feared the worse, that as their masters had warned, they were being sent to Cuba. All gathered together before the men were herded off. Fathers took children in their arms. Women gave way to expressions of grief that touched the hearts of the strongest observers of the scene. According to Towne, this was an exceedingly low point for the Gullahs, who had already withstood so much:

> We, anxious and depressed, talked in low tones over this extra ordinary proceeding. . . . That evening we ladies went to the praise house and heard good, old Marcus exhort, Dagus pray and all sing. Marcus said he had often told all the

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brethren they must be just like birds when the gunner is about, expecting a crack every minute. "Dey ain't neber know what gwine to befal dey, pore black folks must wait and hab faith, . . . Massa laff one day. Ask me if I tink Christ want black nigger in heben. One ting I sure. We'uns gwine to be where de crucify Lord am. And if dat place be Hell, He gwine make it heben for we."[9]

Gullah religion was not quiescent, nor an enslavement of the mind, despite the "Christian" and long-suffering attitude seemingly responsible for their sensitiveness and lofty, visionary approach toward oppression. Many observers were appalled at what they interpreted as resignation among Sea Island African-Americans. Arthur Sumner wrote from St. Helena Island in 1863, "I am astonished that they should be fit to live after such generations of mere animal life. A higher race would have lost all moral sense." Even one of the Gullahs' staunchest advocates, Elizabeth Botume, believed that "the patience of the freedpeople in sickness was so general and remarkable, it seemed like apathy." If what Botume observed was only resignation, it probably was a function of Gullah affiliation with Christianity. Yet their coping capacity was also possible because of the sense of protection that spiritual association offered, with religious and community membership forging ties that strengthened the Gullahs' resolve. Thomas Wentworth Higginson was surprised to find Gullahs so little demoralized and he accurately attributed this to religion:

> I learned to think that we abolitionists had underrated the suffering produced by slavery among the negroes, but had overrated the demoralization. Or rather, we did not know how the religious temperament of the negroes had checked the demoralization. Yet . . . it must be admitted that this temperament, born of sorrow and oppression, is far more marked in the slave than in the native African.[10]

Higginson perceptively realized the lack of "demoralization" wrought by slavery. But the personality and "religious temperament" of Gullahs owed much to a non-Christian tradition, and was not "born of sorrow and oppression" or as foreign to the "native African" as Higginson imagined. As previously suggested, African religion and philosophy emphasized the celebration and affirmation of human life, and within this scheme, while God was the apex of the theory of being, humankind was the center, or pivotal point, of earthly existence. Gullahs were very much a part of this world view. Even though on the conscious level the pillar of their faith rested on their association with Christ, this may have primarily provided Old World ideology with an organized, plausible New

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World perception. Anthropologist Paul Radin has written that the Christian God provided African-American slaves with a "fixed point," and that they converted God to themselves.[11] Of the Gullahs at least it might also be more aptly stated that they converted Christianity to their African world view. Gullahs used religion as a justification to combat objective forces, to collectively perpetuate a rich sublimity in cultural form, and as a spiritually liberating ideology. It was not so much that Christianity instilled a sense of resignation because of belief in future rewards, though admittedly for some this was a determining factor, but that an African philosophical tradition was asserted in the slave quarters.[12]

For slaves, acceptance of Christianity did not imply negation of earthly life. The supreme example of this was their desire for liberty. Freedom was a continuous topic of conversation among them. Robert Smalls, who grew up in antebellum Beaufort, remembered that as a boy he first heard of Frederick Douglass in the slave quarters of one of his owner's Ladies Island plantations. Three people in the slave quarters could read and every scrap of printed matter was given to them to translate. One of the literates, a recent arrival from Charleston, secured a copy of one of Douglass's speeches and read it to the slaves. Between the three literate field hands, the bondspeople of the McKee plantations kept abreast of the "politicking" over slavery. An old slave woman of Edisto Island told Northerner Mary Ames, "I heard for a long time of war and the coming of the Yankees, and I spects my bones be white before I see that time, but I did live to see them, bress de Lord." On one of the St. Helena Island plantations, a black carpenter held a secret night school for the men during bondage.[13] Thus did the Gullahs attempt to apprise themselves of events affecting their future.

The most obvious testament of the Gullahs' will to freedom is their participation in the Civil War, once it became a liberation struuggle. In May 1862, when General Hunter drafted the men without authorization, there was no desire to fight. The Gullah men, having "smelt a very large rat," took to the woods to "split rails,"but were soon rounded up. They were taken to Hilton Head, drilled, kept until after the harvest, placing an extreme hardship on their families, then discharged without pay or freedom. Thus, in the fall of 1862, when the authorized draft was called, with the provision for emancipation, many hesitated. The memories of the previous impressment were still fresh, and "weakened their confidence" in "promises for the future." Enlistments were slow at first. But

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Jesus make de blind see,
Jesus make de cripple walk,
Jesus make de deaf to hear.
Walk in, kind Jesus!
No man can hinder me.[18]

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When Laura Towne heard this impressive spiritual, she believed the refrain "no man can hinder me" meant that "nothing could prevent access to Jesus." Yet Charles Nordhoff, a journalist sent to Port Royal in 1863 to write about Sea Islanders, heard the song and immediately attributed it to "an aspiration for liberty."[19] Certainly there were elements of truth in both interpretations—a combination of mystical belief in the miraculous powers of the Christian God and a deep, sense of freedom—a heritage from the African past. Higginson heard Gullah soldiers sing the song and noted that they sometimes substituted "hinder me" with "hinder we." But he failed to attach any significance to this, merely stating that it was "more spicy to the ear, and more in keeping with the usual head-over-heels arrangement of their pronouns." Despite the perception and usefulness of Higginson's book, it also contains a disturbing air of condescension toward the Gullahs which was typical of some abolitionists. Although he attested to the Gullahs' daring and coolness in combat, thus affirming their equality with whites in terms of courage, he failed to credit them with having any intellectual complexity in their modes of expression. He recognized Gullah soldiers' physical strength but overlooked aspects of their character which bespoke of higher emotions, unless these could be interpreted in a strictly Christian sense. Hence Higginson viewed the Gullahs' songs as "thoroughly religious," and the attitudes contained in them as "always the same, and, as a commentary on the life of the race, . . . infinitely pathetic. Nothing but patience for this life,—nothing but triumph in the next."[20]

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Gullahs were a proud people who did not indulge in self-pity and would have resented being seen in a piteous light by their friend and supporter. Life for the Gullahs was an uphill battle but not without grace and nobility. Higginson sometimes failed to grasp this, despite his close relationship with Gullah soldiers and their families. One can imagine the thoughts of Gullah soldiers as they sang and contemplated that their treasured expectation was becoming a reality. Substitution of "we" for "me," possibly represented feelings of nationalism which had developed over a period of generations when social and cultural traditions

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We'll soon be free,
We'll soon be free,
We'll soon be free,
When de Lord will call us home.

My brudder, how long,
My brudder, how long,
My brudder, how long,
'Fore we done suffrin' here?

It won't be long (thrice)
'Fore de Lord will call us home.[23]

Slaves in Georgetown were jailed at the outbreak of the war for singing this spiritual. As a little drummer boy explained to Higginson, "Dey tink *de Lord* mean for say de Yankees." Higginson doubted that the slaves made the same association of which their masters thought them capable. Once again he reveals his nineteenth-century "romantic racialism." But no one could mistake the plaintive meaning in the following song, first heard at Hilton Head Island and said to have been a song "to which the Rebellion had actually given rise":

No more peck o' corn for me,
No more, no more,
No more peck o' corn for me,
Many tousand go.

No more driver's lash for me,
No more, etc.

No more pint o' salt for me,
No more, etc.

No more hundred lash for me,
No more, etc.

No more mistress' call for me,
. . . .
Many tousand go.[24]

Thus, while God, personified as Jesus, offered Gullahs an explanation for life and provided a model of virtue, as did their African God, this was not an abjuration of human existence. Their religion contained a

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fervent zest for life. As slaves, the cornerstone of their faith rested on confidence that freedom on earth would not be denied them and their progeny. One missionary wrote of how the Gullahs expressed this:

> As they spoke of their trust in the Savior, his assurances, by the application of the promises to their hearts, that "a good time was coming" when their own vines and fig trees would cast their shadows around them in quietness and safety, and no more parting of families be known, our hearts dissolved in sympathy and gratitude in their behalf.[23]

Christianity can be interpreted in fatalistic terms. But to believe Gullahs totally accepted a submissive Christian posture suggests that they did not struggle against the cultural domination that masters attempted to impose through religion. To say, on the other hand, that an element of patience was not present in their form of Christianity would be a denial of historical reality. Resolution of the contradiction may come through understanding the limited role of doctrinal Christianity in Gullah life and thought, and taking a fuller cognizance of the influence of previous traditions. Practically and theologically speaking, Gullahs were not resigned to their condition, and not uncritical of religious teachings. Nor were they beguiled by insipid attempts to "make them better slaves." From their African heritage Gullahs retained optimism—a proclivity to make the best of their near-tragic situation for the sake of communal spirit and future generations. This was more meaningful than blindly striking out and committing racial suicide. The simple issue of the practicality of insurrection must also be considered. They had learned from Vesey and others, perhaps implanting the Charleston insurrection attempt in their memory. They believed armed rebellion was impossible as long as they were enslaved. Higginson stated that he often pondered over why the Gullahs' "daring and endurance" in combat had not manifested itself in armed insurrection against the slavocracy. Predictably, Higginson attributed the lack of large-scale rebellions to "the peculiar temperament of the races, in their religious faith, and in the habit of patience that centuries had fortified." But Higginson added that to have kept "the land in a perpetual flame of insurrection" would have been impossible for a number of reasons:

> The shrewder men all said substantially the same thing. What was the use of insurrection, where everything was against them? They had no knowledge, no money, no arms, no drill, no organization. . . . They had no mountain passes

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alism. Consequently, religion cannot be viewed only or primarily as a source of visionary, spiritual fulfillment. Nor can religion be mainly viewed as manipulative. For Gullahs it offered a politic for collective consciousness and group conformity within an African-Christian synthesis.

Freedom was not attained as the 1822 conspirators had invisioned. When freedom came, years later, a New rather than Old Testament ideology partly gave meaning and fruition to that liberty. As Leon Litwack points out, few triumphs in the spirit of freedom could equal the day in 1865 when in Charleston, a cornerstone was laid for a new African Methodist Church. It was over forty years after the old wooden structure in Hampstead had been destroyed. The new church was to be built by black hands. The architect was Robert Vesey, son of Denmark.[28] In 1822 freedom under the banner of "A Chosen People" eluded black South Carolinians through no fault of those who made the supreme sacrifice. Yet who could fault the Gullahs and perhaps other African-Americans in 1865, as they regarded themselves if not as a chosen people, at least as the "chosen generation" of a "peculiar people?"

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CHAPTER 9

Folk Religion in the Slave Quarters

All was silent on the plantation. The sun had gone down and the chill December wind which blew crisply from the tide-river had driven the people into the cabins. Here and there all over the plantation, like the throbbing stars which night had called to light her world, the red glow of the fireplaces flashed out into the darkness through the open doorways, as if to mark the heart of a home. Suddenly a sharp persistent jingle broke the silence. It was the Praise House bell calling the people of the plantation together for their evening "Praise". . . .*

The secret societies are an embodiment of . . . supernatural power. Collectively, they provide an institutional structure which bears . . . similarities to the medieval church in Europe. . . . They lay down various rules of conduct, prescribe certain forms of behavior and are the sole agency capable of remitting certain sins.**

On the Sea Islands, one rarely saw a plantation home that did justice to the name "big house," since most planters maintained their more elegant residences elsewhere. But there was always a large, airy "main house," sometimes inhabited by the planter and his family during the spring and cold season. The main house was situated about half a mile from the overseer's abode. Not too far away from the overseer's residence were the yards and outbuildings, followed by the slave quarters. Gullahs called their quarters "the street," and it was described as "a real street in the

*"The Long Look," n.d., misc. corr., Penn School Papers, vol. 1, SHC.
**Kenneth Little, "The Role of the Secret Society in Cultural Specialization" American Anthropologist 51 (1949): 199.

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175 795 794 time of the Civil War, over half of the adult population of the Sea Islands were church members. Many others were baptized during the Northern occupation, some stating that "they had desired for years to join the church, but could not get leave from their masters." Francis Kemble noted that on the Butler estate on St. Simon's Island, slaves were forbidden to go to church and ministers were not allowed on the plantation. Yet some slaves were willing to endure corporal punishment and were baptized without approval. An American Missionary Association minister observed in 1863 that "the colored people think a good deal of belonging somewhere. This is alright but I fear many of them have been taught to think that joining church was the principal thing." Arthur 829 Sumner recorded an incident that gives insight into the Gullahs propensity to equate communal and secular concerns. The following conversation occurred between Sumner and his housekeeper Patience:

> "How many children you got, Misser Sumner," said she.
> "Not one, thank the Lord."
> "No Chillun?"
> "I'm not married."
> In sheer amazement she sat down and stared at me as little boys do at the museum.
> "Oh, you'r joking."
> "Fact."
> Then she rolled over, and laughed till she was sore.
> "Not married! Why," said she, "you look settled!"
> She went off, finally, muttering to herself. . . . The next morning she returned to the charge.
> "You a member sure."
> "Eh?"
> "A member, a church member."
> "Neither married nor a member," I replied with solemn voice. She almost dropped my breakfast. She has been trying I see, to comprehend this double phenomenon; but she makes bad work of it. Sometimes I find her looking at me with wonder and commiseration; and if I ask her what she is thinking about she avoids a direct answer.[8]

Sumner's was a kind of individualism which Patience apparently could not fully comprehend. No wife, no children, no membership meant 771 alienation—no place in the community. Gullah religion was not only a 829 contract between God and the individual. It was a mutual agreement among themselves which implied that they could not love God without loving each other. While their common oppression bound them together in one sense, the Gullahs' decision to see themselves as contracting with

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each other to live as "one body" also allowed them to operate collectively and ward off the demoralizing effects of exploitation. A central element in their religious attitude was a sense of individual honor. Love for their fellows, and a respectful disposition would find favor with God. This orientation was often expressed in terms of "manners." "A Christian is mannerable," the Gullahs were fond of saying. One Gullah soldier, in his supplications to heaven, implored, "Let me lib so dat when I die I shall *hab* manners." Northern teacher Harriet Ware described an old Gullah woman, Widow Bedotte, who had been driven insane by watching her master whip her daughter to death; "very sad it is to hear her talk," wrote Ware. Yet, although Widow Bedotte's epithets against her master and the rebels were voluble and denunciatory, "she prides herself upon her good manners, which she says she gets because she belongs to the church, which every now and then she joins again." Charlotte Forten observed the Gullahs' attitude toward each other:

> These people are exceedingly polite in their manner towards each other, each new arrival bowing, scraping his feet and shaking hands with the others, while there are constant greetings such as, "Huddy? How's yer lady?" ("howd' ye do? How's your wife?") The hand-shaking is performed with the greatest possible solemnity. There is never the faintest shadow of a smile on anybody's face during this performance. The children, too are taught to be very polite to their elders, and it is the rarest thing to hear a disrespectful word from a child to his parent, or to any grown person. They have really what the New-Englanders call "beautiful manners."[9]

Despite enslavement and poverty, the Gullahs maintained a generous attitude, never allowing one of their number to go without food or shelter. Kinship was important, but the Gullah concept of a household did not necessarily mean filial attachment, but all those living within a family and community structure, with the rights, duties, and privileges therein. While there were many children without parents because of the ravages of bondage, reportedly there were no orphans on the Sea Islands. Gullahs were also fond of bestowing presents upon their Northern benefactors, or anyone whom they considered a friend. Gifts of sweet potatoes, peanuts, and eggs which had a special spiritual significance and were rather expensive, were often offered to visitors. "They feel hurt if their presents are refused," wrote Laura Towne. "Old Susannah often sends to table, fish and other extras. They don't want pay. No indeed."[10]

While the Christian example contributed to inspiring a kindred spirit, the Gullah's sense of charity also had another source. African peoples

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on the plantation, seated on the box containing his dead body, and as the body was lowered into the grave, she was seized by a frenzied mob, forced into the open pit and every effort was made to bury her alive. These efforts nearly succeeded. But wiser counsels prevailed and she was at last released.[12]

In this situation moral judgment within the slave community was not in keeping with the Christian doctrine of forgiveness that usually characterized the Gullahs' disposition. Instead, it indicates how African influences continued. Apparently, Gullahs believed that some violations should not be summarily dismissed or forgiven. Among the Windward Coast peoples, no concept of sin seems to have been present. Yet among some, the Mende for example, there was a sense of guilt in two areas of government—breaches in communal laws and regulations, and violation of the rights of those unable to help themselves. The BaKongo considered sin to be a wrong against society, not God, and thus should be punished by society. The above Gullah crime could be viewed as betrayal of communal trust, an individual violation, and as an immoral act against the people as a whole. Such violations called for punishment, not only for the offender, but for those closely related to the act.[13] Such irrevocable behavior among the bondspeople could possibly undermine their collective strength and organization, and no doubt Gullahs felt that depravity should be rooted out in a drastic manner as a warning to others who might be driven to commit such violence. Yet the fact that the example was an atypical incident demonstrates that adoption of a common socioreligious connection among Gullahs had more of a restraining effect on deviant social behavior than threat of violent retaliation.

In the Gullah slave community the most important people were religious leaders, comprising two groups. One consisted of black elders, and the others were spiritual parents, or the black elders' "help." Black elders were chosen by whites, often by Baptist planters. These black leaders, referred to as "deacons" or "watchmen" were responsible for "watchcare" of members of the plantation societies. They were the experienced church members in the quarters, having some knowledge of Christianity and probably taking their religion more literally and seriously than their fellow bondspeople. Black elders maintained relatively close contact with the Baptist churches during the last thirty years of bondage, and were exemplary people, managing to walk a thin line between securing the trust and confidence of both masters and slaves.[14] Undoubtedly, to the slaveholders black elders embodied those features of Christianity which,

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adding to a collective attitude in the quarters. Total immersion was exclusively their way of being baptized and, although a Christian service, the pomp, color, and ceremony was original to the slaves. The Gullahs' method of baptism, with its solemn pageantry, had African antecedents as well as Christian form. But more important, from the slaves' point of view, the rite was uniquely a prerequisite for community stature within their own society.

Gullah efforts to construct an organized harmonious social system was further illustrated by the fact that, while collective affiliation in the slave quarters was most significant, a sense of individual fulfillment was also essential. Hence, while "seekin'" culminated in acceptance of socialization through church membership, the experience itself was a private one and the desire to "seek Jesus" was a slave's personal decision, although not devoid of community pressure. The travel, the visions, and the solitude possibly represented a bondsperson's inner reflection and recognition of "self" as opposed to his or her treatment as "thing" by the master. Efforts toward acquiring a valuable self-image is related in the slave's dependence on the spiritual parent who listened to and interpreted individual experiences. The significance of individual experience also had its source in the personal attachment to and identification with Christ, prophets, and disciples rather than to perceived abstractions and inapplicable doctrines within Christianity. Moreover, Gullah cultural achievements represent manifestations of individual creativity as well as collective will and fortitude.

In the Gullah socioreligious community, exclusiveness served collective goals perhaps in the way that secrecy in Poro and Sande expressed loyalty, solidarity, and trust. One illustration of this was the practice of close communion among Gullahs. Close communion was actually an elitist doctrine which the slaves apparently adopted from their Calvinist-oriented Baptist slavemasters. American Missionary Association ministers stated that the Gullahs practiced close communion before they came. "I find that the colored people understand the doctrine of 'close communion' perfectly well," wrote the Reverend Augustine Roots from Port Royal in 1863. "I have however said, myself nothing about the matter of communion." This was not the opinion of Laura Towne. She related that a white Baptist minister, Mr. Horton, informed the Gullahs that no one "who taught different doctrines" had any right "even to stand in the pulpit." Horton further told the Gullahs that those with different reli-

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institutions," and they were controlled from within. While confusion and vacillation occurred in other areas, within Gullah black societies there was organization, structure, and a cameraderie transferable to the slave quarters. Religion was their "fixed point" and the one realm where they needed authority if a group attitude was to be maintained. The concept of close communion was not completely new, given the African heritage. And black elders insisted that only members of the societies had a right to fellowship, for probably no event more symbolized integration of the individual into the socioreligious connection than acceptance of the elements representing the mystical blood and body of Christ. This ritual bound members of the various societies. The more exclusive the event, the more it impressed upon the communicants the responsibilities entailed. By joining society, Praise House, and church, an individual became a full participant in the community. Communion service epitomized this relationship. Communion was not only a method of initiating new converts into the socioreligious connection, but a way of reminding old members of their commitments. In addition to being "de Ark ob Safety" in the spiritual sense, communion was possibly a conduct agreement, restricting antisocial behavior yet inspiring a feeling of personal status very much in the way that Poro and Sande did in West Africa. Gullahs and Africans used their religion to fulfill sacred and secular communal needs in similar ways. In both instances the main emphasis was on community preservation. In each case an institution evolved that initiated individuals into society and committed them to abide by the customs, beliefs, and practices of the group for the sake of unity and order, while not ignoring the members' need to maintain a sense of self.

Once the candidates were baptized and given communion, they were then members of the black society and the plantation Praise House. This new status gave former candidates the right to participate in the ring shout which was held at the praise meeting or in the home of the individual considered to be the most pious. One of the earliest available antebellum description of the ring shout was provided by Charles Lyell, who traveled through the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands in 1848. According to Lyle, on the Hopeton plantation of James Hamilton Couper, over twenty violins were silenced by the Methodist missionaries. Thus was music and dancing, the slaves' chief form of merrymaking, prohibited. Yet Methodists did allow slaves to engage in a form of physical exercise after prayer meetings, hence the origin of the "shout":

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tinctly the scene. The benches had all been taken outside to make a clear floor. The table with the books was shoved into a corner. A brilliant fire of lightwood was blazing in the chimney and a torch of the same hung in a tin bucket in a corner. Under this bucket the leader stood. She was a visitor. She was 50 or 60 years old, black and scrawney, only a few teeth left in her head. She had been singing for hours but still went on like one possessed. Gleaming with perspiration from head to heel—her dress at the bosom thrown wide open her head thrown back eyes closed, teeth prominent, head kerchief loose and hanging arms bare, clapping and shouting with a shrill ringing voice. I can recall in most of the other Negroes each with a different step, individual and characteristic. Some very much in earnest almost reverential, some heavy and stupid and some enjoying the fun. My grandmother's coachman "Sam" particularly, very black, good looking, smart and mischievous. I can recall the gleam of his eyes as he grinned at us in passing and improvised some peculiar contractions for our special benefit.[45]

For the Gullahs, then, the Christian experience was a means of communal fulfillment on the individual as well as collective level, and plantation life had aspects of an African village in microcosm. Gullahs attempted to exert control over their environment just as their African forbears had. For Africans it was a hostile natural ambiance that most threatened the group. For slaves it was an oppressive socioeconomic system that challenged their will to develop self-esteem and social cohesion. Gullahs successfully met that challenge and rose above bondage in a spiritual and communal sense. By combining the edifying features of Christianity and African culture and philosophy, they created a practical folk religion that served them well, under the travail of slavery.

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Another spiritual expressed a sense of optimism and a superior attitude toward death:

O Massa Death,
He's a very little man,
He goes from door to door;
He kills some souls,
and he woundeth some.
Good Lord remember me;
Good Lord remember me;
Remember me as the years roll round,
Good Lord, remember me.[2]

In Christian belief the finality of death was often negated. One of the most appealing aspects of Christianity for Gullahs was the expectation of a better life after death. This afterlife was not visualized in the African sense, that an individual's status would not differ from one's mortal position. Instead, Gullahs strongly adopted the Christian concept of heaven, where all "true believers" would sit on "Christ's right side." For obvious reasons, this was one of the tenets of Christianity they most cherished.[3] While their African world view encouraged Gullahs to take a rich, positive attitude toward life, through Christian influence they expected a better life as payment for their suffering. As one person expressed it:

> De harder me cross to bear down here de better I go be prepare to tek me place in dat Happy Land where all is 'joicin, an' when I git dere, I want de Lord to say, "Ophelia . . . come an' rest wid de elect ob de Lord!"[4]

There was little in Gullah prayers or songs to indicate they feared the tribunal expected to reward the "faithful" and damn the "sinners." Thus they disregarded that portion of their religious instruction which strenuously emphasized a judgment day where "every theft or falsehood" would be brought to light and held against them. What was more important to the Gullahs was a change in their conditions. Just as Baptist slavemaster Daniel Pope queried Marcus, the Praise House elder, as to whether the Gullahs really believed Christ wanted "black nigger in heben," so were slaves convinced that the "Kingdom of God" would have almost no white subjects. Gullah Christianity was one of recompense. Slaves accepted the Christian doctrine of eternal life but modified it so that heaven was an exclusive place, primarily available to sufferers of the right hue as expressed by a former slave:

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It is impossible to reconcile the mind of the native slave to the idea of living in a state of perfect equality, and boundless affection with white people. Heaven will be no heaven to him, if he is not to be avenged of his enemies. I know, from experience, that these are fundamental rules of his religious creed; because I learned them in the religious meetings of the slaves themselves. A favorite and kind master or mistress may now and then be admitted into heaven, but this rather as a matter of favor, due to the intercession of some slave, than as a matter of strict justice to the whites, who will, by no means be of an equal rank with those who shall be raised from the depths of misery, in this world.
The idea of a revolution in the conditions of the whites and the blacks, is the cornerstone of the religion of the latter; and indeed it seems to me, at least, to be quite natural, if not in strict accordance with the precepts of the Bible.[5]

Although the Gullahs did not fear death, they recognized its power; and the passing of one of their number had a profound effect on the community. As has been noted, Methodist missionaries observed this and often tried to use the drama of death among the Gullahs to "bind them to the cross."[6] But while the Gullahs' perception of life after death was essentially of Christian origin, many practices associated with the dying and the dead were derived from African antecedents.

When death was expected, the plantation community felt compelled to enter into the spirit of the event and vicariously involve themselves in the death throes of the individual, lest when their time came they have to face the ordeal alone, or the deceased, dissatisfied with the send-off, would return and bring evil. The dying person was surrounded by the community, who offered comfort and support. "We got tuh help him cross de ribber," the Gullahs would say. Friends of the dying were expected to bring gifts even though the sufferer could not use them. Such offerings were usually edibles "tuh taste de mou't," but never flowers. Singing, praying, and pious conversation filled the cabin nightly. It was not a solemn time unless sad or obscure circumstances caused the death, but rather was somewhat cheerful, and the subject of death itself was not neglected. Everyone was expected to hold forth as part of the ritual of coaching the dying person to report a heavenly visit or some other evidence of "dying good." When the sufferer drew the last breath, everyone present gave a loud shriek as notification that another soul "done crossed ober." Many Northern teachers were repulsed at the Gullah "death-watch":

This practice of sitting up all night with the dying, H. W. [Harriet Ware] justly enough condemns as "heathenish." "The houses cannot hold them all, of course,

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and they sit round out-of-doors in the street, the younger ones often falling asleep on the ground, and then they 'hab fever.' "
But of course it was useless to expostulate with them; to their minds the omission of the watch would be a mark of great disrespect.[7]

Like their African forebears, Gullahs believed in the presence of evil almost as much as they believed in the forces of good, and their attempts to please both God and the "powers of darkness" explain much about their customs regarding death. Even though they professed to believe that God "called" his servants to heaven, death was still looked upon as an instrument of the powers of darkness. Thus night vigils, singing, praying, and preaching around the bedside of the dying was supposed to strengthen the person as they "passed death's door." The loud shrieks as the last breath was drawn were said to be a formal announcement of the death, but also "scares off the spirits of hell who are always lurking around to get possession of another soul."[8]

Gullahs believed that one could not always know whether demise had come through natural causes because "God called," a "good" death, or by witchcraft, considered a "bad" death. This was also true of many African peoples. Among those of the Windward Coast, death reportedly came to people because God or the ancestors wanted them or because of witchcraft. If witchcraft was suspected, a rather gruesome postmortem was performed. Among the Mende and other groups, a "probing man" would be given permission to search the deceased's abdomen for evidence of witchcraft. The spleen was removed and placed in a pot containing a solution of certain leaves and water. If the spleen sank to the bottom of the pot, the deceased was declared a witch. If the spleen floated, the deceased was free of witchcraft. Among the BaKongo, the concept of "a bad or a good death" was also important. Characteristics indicating a bad death were the sick person quarreling with those present, having severe pains, or a prolonged death agony. If a person could not speak properly when dying, or turned his or her head toward the wall, a bad death was also suspected. A bad death meant a person was "shot with nkisi-guns," and was considered a *ndoki* or witch. A good death was a calm ordeal, peaceful and easy, with the person lying on his or her back.[9] Gullah attitudes about "good" and "bad" deaths were infused with African customs, though the death watch was viewed in a Christian context.

An individual was said to "die good," that is, of natural causes with

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"Hark! from the tomb a doleful sound
My ears, attend the cry;
Ye living men, come view the ground
Where you must shortly lie."

. . . A prayer was offered. . . . This concluded the services at the grave. No burial or commital service was read. . . . At a subsequent time, when all the relatives and friends could be brought together a big funeral sermon was preached by some of the antebellum negro preachers.

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The presence of a plantation slave "doctor" is reminiscent of the BaKongo *nganga*, who employed life-affirming *nkisi* to heal and ward off bad medicine or *kindoki*. The charm did not work for the plantation slave, and the large funeral turn-out may represent the people's desire to protect themselves from whatever evil had caused Mary's death as well as to express their respect. Passing the woman's baby back and forth over her coffin was a well-known Gullah graveside custom. "Dead moder will hant de baby," Gullahs explained, and "worry him in his sleep." A similar custom among the BaKongo was women crossing back and forth over the graveside of a woman who died in childbirth, hoping that such a fate would not befall them. Singing at the grave was also part of the BaKongo send-off. The funeral, a lavish affair, would take place when all members of the clan could gather and when enough food could be collected.[13]

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Thus another aspect of Gullah religion was a syncretic blend of belief in the efficacy of Christian salvation, the prevalence of the living dead, and the awesome powers of conjuration. It was sometimes difficult to determine where they believed the most power rested. At any rate, their expression, "Love God and fear the devil" indicates that, as a precautionary measure, they preferred to respect the authority and domain of both. For Gullahs saw no contradiction in being firm proponents of the Baptist faith and protecting themselves against forces of the supernatural as well. In spite of the Gullahs' strong profession of Christianity, Laura Towne noted that "They believe in the evil eye, and also in the power of a good eye for healing," and that "they are afraid of being alone at night, or of sleeping alone, for fear 'the hag will ride we.' " A slaveholding South Carolina minister remembered Elihu, a "devout, old creditable deacon" of the church and highly respected exhorter in the slave quarters. Upon passing the old man's cabin, the owner observed an inverted horseshoe over the door. Since Elihu's skill as a hostler was well known, the owner

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assumed that the horseshoe was a "professional sign." However, the insignia was instead a charm against supernatural agencies:

> "What is that over your door Elihu?"
> "Dat for witches, Massa."
> "For what?"
> "Witches, Massa. Nebber sleep, no how, widout horseshoe to keep out de witches."[14]

Thus, besides the Christian version of immortality, elements of African tradition also accounted for the Gullahs' attitude toward death, as indeed it did in their attitude about life. As previously stated, existence of spirits of the deceased was not only central to African ontology, but these beings constituted the largest group of religious intermediaries. Hence, Africans viewed death as perhaps the most important rite of passage rather than as the demise of life. Death was a momentous transition, requiring demonstrative evidence that the physical presence of the deceased would be missed. But it was just as necessary to celebrate this passage into the spirit world in a manner that indicated a continued existence. Africans believed that the spirit which survived the body was conscious of all earthly events and had the power to exercise influence over the destiny of the living. Consequently, the death of a clan member was observed with greatest respect and the death commemoration had to be expressed collectively.[15]

Ancestors were said to retain their normal human passions and appetites which had to be gratified in death as they had been in life. Ancestors felt hunger and thirst. They became angry or happy depending on the behavior of their living "children." If neglected, the living dead were vindictive, but propitious if respected. Just as filial loyalty prevents one from allowing a parent to go hungry, "so must food be offered to the ancestors." Among the BaKongo, food was put out immediately after the burial and palm wine poured over the grave. Survivors believed the deceased would eat the food, and bless those who placed it there.[16]

Among the Gullahs, even for one who "died good," the spirit could not rest if something had been left behind which it desired. It was observed that the Gullahs and other African-Americans placed articles on newly formed graves. These objects were usually personal belongings, broken pottery and porcelain, playthings, lighting utensils, objects pertaining to medicine, food, and water. According to the antebellum mem-

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nigger been press close to me. I say: "Dats de bery man steal my money." I'quire roun de station and find out who he be. Dey say he uh man from John Island and dey call 'e name to me.

No, I ain't make no 'temp to call-de police. Dat man done spend de money anyhow. I jest say: "All right. I goin' to leave yuh wid God."

When I git home, I shet my door and put de whole ting 'fore God. I tell um my trouble and what dat man done 'gainst me. In two week time dat man jest as stiff and cold as uh piece ob iron.[28]

This may be similar to the power of *nkisi*, essentially a positive force working for the good, to ward off *kindoki*, and thus doing an evil deed. Generally speaking, however, the deity represented forces of good. Gullahs believed in the power of God and saw that power as a form of protection. This may perhaps explain why interviewers for the Federal Writers Project observed that nearly all the doors and windows of Gullah cabins were painted blue, the color of the heavens. One theory was that the custom of painting doors and windows blue was an unconscious holdover from the early days of slavery in the Sea Islands when Gullahs were given the residue from indigo vats to use on the doors and windows of their cabins. However this does not explain the fact that Gullah conjurers concocted pills for their "patients" the color of which was usually blue also. Perhaps then, the shade blue was effective in keeping out "speerits." Spirits were said to be afraid of blue because it reminded them of heaven, hence evil beings could not stand the sight of blue. But the Gullahs themselves would not verify either notion regarding their preference for blue. If asked why they painted their doors and windows blue, Gullahs would smile wryly and say some people "jest lak dat color."[29]

Thus, while Gullahs turned gratefully to the Christian God, whom they regarded as a warm, personal friend, this did not prevent them from retaining some of their ingrained customs and beliefs, as is observed in their attitudes toward life, death and the supernatural. And, even in the Gullahs' approach toward death, a sense of community prevailed. The ritual was observed with respect and responsibility. There was a feeling of satisfaction that, while the individual had to cross the river alone, the right impetus had been given before the deceased left the earth, and thus the living had done their part by fulfilling their collective obligation for the last time.

A direct relationship appears to exist between the African and Gullah theory of being. In both, God (Jesus for the Gullahs) was the apex,

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representing honor, constancy, harmony, and perfection, while humanity occupied the center, ever striving to be godlike through a sense of love, community, kinship, and cooperation. In addition, the good and bad of the spirit world existed in both traditions although it was far more complex for Africans than for Gullahs. These beings included superhumans, animals, and objects without biological life.[30] Gullahs applied the African ontology, adapted Christianity and bondage to it, and created a religion that employed spirituality as a means of self-preservation and as a vital component of community life. It is, then, to the Gullahs' credit that though circumstances prevented them from rising up against slavery, they did not succumb to white cultural domination. Instead, they successfully rose above many of the negative ingredients of Christianity while assimilating certain other attributes which were synthesized with African culture. In bondage, Gullahs achieved elevation on the level of personal culture and the molding of community values. The edifying qualities of Gullah religious belief must be seen as having contributed much to that achievement, just as an element of truth must be recognized in the assertion that insofar as people develop their own culture they are not slaves.[31]

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175 541 569 mer slaves, "chiefly colored woman with gay handkerchiefs on their heads, and a sprinkling of men" (since most able-bodied males were in the army). All the blacks reportedly "had the bearing and distinct respectable look they always had on Sundays and holidays." The services began with a prayer. The Emancipation Proclamation was read by William Brisbane, a South Carolinian who freed his slaves before the war. Then the chaplin presented the colors to the regiment—all according to program. After the chaplin's introductory remarks, and just as Higginson "took and waved the flag," but before he began to speak, the "unexpected," and "startling" occurred. A "strong" but "cracked and elderly" male voice was heard. Instantly, two female voices blended in as if by "an impulse too strong to be repressed." They sang:

> My Country, 'tis of thee,
> Sweet land of liberty,
> Of thee I sing!

They went on "verse after verse" as the people on the platform appeared stunned. "It seemed the choked voice of a race at last unloosed," Higginson wrote. The rest of the blacks joined in and the whites also began, but Higginson motioned the latter to silence. "I never saw anything so electric," he wrote. "It made all other words seem cheap." "Art," wrote Higginson, "could not have dreamed of a tribute to the day of Jubilee . . . history will not believe it . . . tears were everywhere." Corporal Robert Sutton, a favorite of Higginson's, spoke, vowing that no black soldier would rest until all his brothers and sisters were free. "Boys," he vowed, "we will take Christ for our Captain who never lost a battle."[1]

175 569 The moment of freedom, more than any event, bound African-Americans to Christianity. Their deliverance from the house of bondage "by no man,"[2] as they believed, did more to instill faith in Christianity than any doctrines taught by whites.

567 • 871 177 178 Although religious instruction was intended as a conservative element in slave life, and clearly it did not provide the bondspeople with a successful ideology of revolt, slave religion, a synthesis of African and Christian traditions, was used in a progressive manner by slaves. Their application of collective moral principles under the guise of Christianity illustrates how religion can be used effectively to keep a community spiritually alive and culturally creative during a period of historical crisis. Although religion was at the heart of the Gullahs' process of socialization

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in the slave quarters, this did not imply total acceptance of a Judeo-Christian concept of reality. The Gullahs broadened the meaning of Christianity, organizing and integrating it into past beliefs and practices. Two traditions formed the basis of the Gullahs' struggle against slavery. The example of Christ allowed them to take a superior attitude toward their oppressors. But they also exerted spiritual and psychological autonomy by clinging to Africanity. In their isolation, the Gullahs remained an uprooted people whose acceptance of Christianity was sometimes outward, selective, and subject to reinterpretations which would not force them to relinquish old ways entirely. Of course, African beliefs, where these remained, accommodated the slave situation just as Christianity, to some extent, accommodated African religion and philosophy. Where Protestantism did not tolerate Africanity as a separate expression, Africanisms sometimes continued through secretiveness or by finding a place at the center of Protestantism as practiced by the slaves.

As Lawrence Levine notes, freedom placed the slaves in a culturally marginal situation, and weakened their "cultural self-containment." No longer were values and cultural standards determined from within the group. African-Americans found themselves in a bicultural situation, absorbing elements of the dominant society in order to obtain recognition and privileges. Perhaps at the moment of freedom the period of accommodation began as a significant factor in black life. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the organization of the black church. This point may be most easily illustrated by the motif of the gospel songs and their otherworldly context, whereas the slave spirituals were full of camouflaged prayers for freedom. As Levine points out, the period after bondage reflects a changing consciousness.[3] Slave religion bred radicalism in the early years, and progressivism later. The institutionalized black church, formed after freedom, was far more powerful and independent, but often counseled conservatism.

Sam Polite lived long past bondage. He was over one hundred years old when he prayed the prayer of "The Long Look." He had grown up in slavery, lived through emancipation, reconstruction, restoration, and into the twentieth century of segregation. Still he prayed the prayer of hope. Still he asked for a sign—a look at the future for his people. Polite's prayer implied what history has revealed—that the "New Jerusalem" evaded the African-Americans after freedom. The emancipation experience, born of hope and optimism, brought a new kind of bondage.

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Gullahs and other African-Americans were to readjust to the new religion that served them so well in bondage. Slave religion was an adaptive and vital spiritualism, a guide for living and for struggle. Acceptance of Christianity had little to do with accommodating slavery. Acceptance of segregation after freedom, without a struggle, owed much to the creeping conservatism within the black church.

One hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, a black religious leader spoke out that "the Negro is not free." Outside forces that prevented black equality are well known. Historical forces within black society, on the leadership level, have been analyzed but little. Gullahs and other African-Americans did not come out of bondage unscathed. But they did emerge, for the most part, psychologically and communally intact. Though toughened by generations of bitter servitude, they maintained an optimistic spirit. Gullahs were not accommodationists in 1863 and 1865, but a community hoping and eager to take their place as citizens. They were aware of their strength as a people. What happened to erode the African-American sense of worldly confidence was not so much born of slavery as it was the product of unfulfilled promises from the national sector and perhaps disappointed leadership from the black institutional religious community in the years of the first freedoms and afterward. As W. E. B. DuBois stated, the greatness of black religion can only be found in its link with the "spiritual strivings of the black masses," as it takes a stand on social and political issues affecting African-Americans.

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19. Laman, *Kongo*, II: 22–23; Balandier, *Daily Life in Kongo*, 217–20, 246–57; Willoughby, *Soul of Bantu*, 71, 77–82, 315; Weeks, *Among the BaKongo*, 158–71.

20. Weeks, *Among the BaKongo*, 266–68, 278; Laman, *Kongo*, II: 92; MacGaffey, *Custom in Lower Kongo*, 148–50; Willoughby, *Soul of Bantu*, 86; Opoku, *West African Religion*, 36–39; Amponsah, *Topics on African Traditional Religion*, 86; Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief*, 30–33; Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958; repr. from 1941 ed.), 206; Roger Bastide, *African Civilizations in the New World*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 106, 161; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 181–203; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 132–58; John M. Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 139–47; Elizabeth A. Fenn, "Honoring the Ancestors; Kongo-American Graves in the American South," *Southern Exposure* 28 (September–October, 1985): 42–57; "Notes and Documents; Antebellum and War Memories of Mrs. Telfair Hodgson," Sarah Hodgson Torian, ed., *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (December, 1953): 352; Albert H. Stoddard, "Origin, Dialect, Beliefs and Characteristics of the Negroes of the South Carolina and Georgia Coasts," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 28 (September, 1944): 181–93; Irving E. Lowrey, *Life on the Old Plantation* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1911), 81–86; South Carolina Folklore Project, #1655, D-4-27A, WPA, SCL: Folk-Lore Scrap-Book, "Mortuary Customs and Beliefs of South Carolina Negroes," from an article originally published in the *Atlanta Constitution* by May A. Waring, *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 7 (1894): 318–19.

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23. Sibley and Westermann, *Liberia*, 213–14; Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief*, 54–59; Rattray, *Religion in Ashanti*, 148–49; Mbiti, *African Religions*, 168–171, Chapters 15–16; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 37; Janzen and MacGaffey, *Kongo Religion*, 34–35; Laman, *Kongo*, III: 81–105.

24. Mbiti, *African Religions*, 166–67, Rattray, *Religion in Ashanti*, 38–39; Parsons, *Religion in an African Society*, 71–72; Sibley and Westermann, *Liberia*, 211; Folkways Research Series, *History of Gola Tribe*, II: 22–23; Glave, "Fetishism in Congo Land," 828–29; Weeks, *Among the BaKongo*, 214–18; Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun*, 37, 110–14; Laman, *Kongo*, II: 130–32.

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27. Despite the exalted modern application of the term "ontology" in its reference to abstract being, "ontology" originally referred to that which belongs to existent finite being. See Walter Brugger, ed., *Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. Kenneth Baker (Spokane: Gonzaga University Press, 1972), 301–2 ("Ontology"). With regard to African culture and spirituality, the concept of being cannot be restricted to the physiological, as opposed to the psychological or fantastic sphere.

28. MacGaffey, *Custom in Lower Kongo*, 261–62; Parsons, *Religion in an African Society*, 173–76, 179, 183–85; Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, Chapters 2–6; Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, trans. Colin King (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959), passim; Sibley and Westermann, *Liberia*, 187–88; Abraham, *Mind of Africa*, 52; Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief*, 115–17; Mbiti *African Religions*, 2–16.

29. Michael Welton, "Themes in African Traditional Belief and Ritual," *Practical Anthropology* 18 (1971): 1–8; E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion, A Definition* (London: SMC Press, 1973), 61–68; *CAJ*, January 31, 1834; *SCA*, July 28, 1843, February 16, 1844, October 30, 1846; Charlotte Forten, "Life on the Sea Islands," Part I, *Atlantic Monthly* 13 (June, 1864): 592.

30. Mbiti *African Religions*, 210–13; Abraham, *Mind of Africa*, 106; Sibley and Westermann, *Liberia*, 190–91; Parsons, *Religion in an African Society*, 174, 183–84; Harris and Sawyerr, *Mende Belief*, 103–5; Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, 41, 81–89; Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, Chapters 5–6; Jahn, *Muntu*, 110, 114–17; Amponsah, *Topics on African Traditional Religion*, 70–80; Opoku, *West African Religion*, 152–60.

31. Mbiti, *African Religions*, 16.

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the known campgrounds by name, location, and dates of their existence. Crum, *Gullah*, 151. According to Crum, W. A. Massebeau in *Camp Meetings in South Carolina* (1919) records the names of 50 campgrounds. Of these only one, Black Swamp, is south of Charleston. Black Swamp was in the Beaufort District and is close to Savannah. The area experienced its religious revival in the 1830s; Capers, *Catechism*, 14–16; *SCA*, June 30, 1843, July 14, 1843, December 29, 1843, January 12, 1849; John McKim to Mrs. Wendell Garrison, April 20, 1864, W. Athorp to Mrs. Wendell P. Garrison, April 20, 1867 Antislavery Papers; Allen Diary, 18–19, 127–28, 164; Nicholas George Julius Ballanta, *St. Helena Spirituals* (New York: G. Schirmer Press, 1925), Introduction and Foreword; Higginson, *Army Life*, 187–88; Crum, *Gullah*, 132–34.

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65. *SCA*, December 29, 1843.

66. *CAJ*, August 18, 1837.

67. Higginson, *Army Life*, 71–72.

68. *CAJ*, January 31, 1834; *SCA*, June 26, 1840; Archie Epps, "A Negro Separatist Movement in the Nineteenth Century," *The Harvard Law Review* 4, no. 1 (Summer–Fall, 1966): 69–80; *Proceedings of Charleston Meeting*, 48–49; Fripp Diary, 60.

69. *CAJ*, September 7, 1833, November 7, 1834; *SCA*, September 15, 1843, September 6, 1850; Thompson, *English Working Class*, 367–68.

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70. "Report of Missionary Society," *Minutes of South Carolina Conference*, January 13, 1847, 11, HSSCC; *SCA*, June 26, 1840, September 15, 1843, September 29, 1843.

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71. Albert H. Stoddard, "Origin, Dialect, Beliefs and Characteristics of the Negroes of the South Carolina and Georgia Coasts," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 28 (September, 1944): 186–95; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1969), Chapters 2, 3, 5, and especially 7; Views on the "spirit" versus the "letter" of Christian doctrine are based on Friedrich Hegel, *Early Theological Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), Chapter 2, ii, "The Moral Teaching of Jesus, (a) The Sermon on the Mount Contrasted with the Mosaic Law and with Kant's Ethics": iv, "The Religious Teaching of Jesus"; E. J. Hobsbawn, *Primitive Rebels*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1963), Intro., especially Chapters 1–3.

72. "Pastoral Address," *Minutes of South Carolina Conference*, December 25, 1844, 14–15, HSSCC; *SCA*, January 29, 1847; Norwood, *American Methodism*, 208–9; Barnes, *Southern Baptist Convention*, 40–41; *Proceedings of Charleston Meeting*, 71–72.

7. *To Make Them Better Slaves: Baptist Persuation, 1830–1861*

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1. *Proceedings of the Meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, May 13–15, 1845 on the Religious Instruction of the Negroes* (Charleston: B. Jenkins, 1845), 49; Theodore Rosengarten, *Tombee, Portrait of a Cotton Planter, Journal of Thomas B. Chaplin, 1812–1890* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 146–47; *CAJ*, June 20, 1834; Harvey H. Jackson, "Hugh Bryan and the Evangelical Movement in South Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly* 47, 3rd. ser., no. 4 (October, 1986): 594–95; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 152–57; A. H. Newman, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States* (New York: Christian Literature, 1894), 4–6, 79; David Benedict, *A General History of The Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1848 repr. from 1813 ed.), 701–3; Joe Madison King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia: General Board, South Carolina Baptist Convention, 1964) 212–14; H. A. Tupper, ed., *Two Centuries of the First Baptist Church in South Carolina, 1663–1833* (Baltimore: R. H. Wooland, 1899), 224–25; Euhaw Baptist Church Mss., March 14, 1834, Lawton Family Papers, SCL; Charlotte Verstille to Nancy Ver-

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
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164–66; Edwin S. Williams to Rev. S. S. Jocelyn, January 28, 1863, AMA. For an interesting discussion of the fusion of Old and New Testament figures, see Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 252–55.

7 George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, 19 vols., *South Carolina Narratives*, vols. 2 & 3, in 4 parts (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1972), II (2) 180–81.

8. Charlotte Forten, "Life on the Sea Islands," Part II, *Atlantic Monthly* 13 (June, 1864): 672.

9. Mansfield French to Revs. Whipple and Jocelyn, n.d., AMA; Ira Berlin, ed., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867, Series II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 49–50; Allen Diary, 57–58; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 145–48; Diary of Laura M. Towne, 26, Penn School Papers, SHC. It is interesting to note that "Old Marcus' " "Massa" was Daniel Pope of the Oaks Plantation. Pope was an important individual in St. Helena's Baptist Church. The Oaks was one of the plantations where Northerners saw so many signs of "Ill-treatment," and was referred to as "de cruelest place." Towne Diary, 32–33.

10. Arthur Sumner to Lt. Joseph Clark, January 23, 1863, Penn School Papers, vol. 4 SHC: Botume, *Amongst the Contrabands*, 218; Higginson, *Army Life*, 231–39.

11. Paul Radin, "Status, Phantasy, and the Christian Dogma," in Clifton Johnson, ed., *God Struck Me Dead: Religious Conversion Experiences and Autobiographies of Negro Ex-Slaves* (Nashville: Social Science Institute, Fisk University, 1945), Foreword, i–ix.

12. There is much that is interesting and convincing in Radin's analysis of slave religion. But he does not take into account fully, the effects of slave religion on social cohesion in the quarters. Radin ignores the cultural and communal components of slave religion—its most progressive elements. He apparently views slave religion in mainly Christian terms, referring to the slaves' "sin" and desire for cleanliness and rebirth. The self-doubt and vacillation which he maintains the Christian conversion experience dispelled represents an analysis of the role of Christianity only on one level. It does not take full cognizance of other influences on the development of black religion. Perhaps Radin attributes too much to Christianity, and views the slaves' perception of Christianity too simply. The Gullahs' conception of sin differed from that which the masters attempted to instill. The slaves looked beyond the concept of a personal God, an "other world," a "rebirth," and beyond an attitude toward sin that worked against their interests. We agree with Radin that religion helped the slaves escape "demoralization" and "neurosis." Radin credits this "escape" from the degrading features of enslavement to Christianity. But communal and cultural development also provided that extra layer of faith. His interpretation of the psychological features and effects of the conversion experience would be even more insightful if a broader approach to slave religion were taken. Ibid.

13. John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 377; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 132; Dorothy Sterling, *Captain of the Planter: The Story of Robert Smalls*, (New York: Doubleday, 1958) 32–33; Ames, *Dixie Diary*, 45; Towne Diary, passim. Northern teachers related that the Gullahs sometimes found ways to gain some literacy during slavery. Two house servants "picked it up from their master's children," letter by letter. Several other people learned from hymn books. Some were never taught but picked up letters "here and there," which enabled them to read "easy sentences." Allen Diary, 62.

14. Berlin, *Freedom: Black Military Experience*, 46–54; Allen Diary, 155; Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 68–70, 75–76, 93–97; Higginson, *Army Life*, 39–40.

41 Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mrs. Janie Hunter

THEY WANT ME TO TALK ABOUT THE PAST

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I tell you, young people got a lot chance to think more in their age than I had to think in my days. 'Cause I couldn't think 'bout nothing but plant peas and corn in my days. But now these children got so much different thing to go through and learn, and they got nice schools. If they don't learn, it's nobody's fault but their own. Then I try to teach them these stories and different song and let them know what blues was like in my days coming up. My children like it. They sit down and they want me to talk about the past. They enjoy hearing it. I want them to know about it, so when I gone there be somebody to carry it on.

Mrs. Isabel Simmons

LIFE IS VERY DIFFERENT NOW

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The old times was hard, but we still need religion right now. Life is very different now.

There is so much television here now; you didn't had that. It don't make life easier for me; it make 'em hard 'cause people stay home more. Lot don't go to church and different thing because they stay for see story. In them time only story you would hear tell, you tell your own story. This time, you watch television for story.

And the children now, they watch the TV and they take the thing on the TV to do just what they doing now. They think what is on the TV is real. But them time there doesn't be that kind of killing and shooting and cutting up like what going on now. Once in a while you hear about somebody die, but don't never hear about nobody get killed.

Mrs. Alice Wine

EVERYBODY SITTING ON THEIR OWN STOOPS

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'Course that day, coming in 1919, all around like that, people was more friendly to one another. People come and sit with you and read the Bible. But these days you don't find anybody come visit. Everybody sitting on their own stoops. You don't find nobody to my house. When you're sick, people used to go around and have meeting for you and pray for you. Now the people who live in the house with the sick people got to come and ask somebody come pray for them. But before, people know you is sick. Not now. That's done pass.

41 Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. Benjamin Bligen

I REALIZE I'M HERE FOR SOME PURPOSE

159 794 I was about twenty-seven when I start to go to Moving Star Hall regular. Since I was a little boy, Mom used to take me there on her back—I was so small to walk in the dark, you know.

159 794 There was a time when blues was all that was on my mind. But the truth is the light, and after getting old in age I realize that I'm here for some 794 purpose. Father always teach me the Bible, teach us how to sing and how 532 to pray, and tell us what must not do and what must do to inherit life ever- [869] lasting. So I stop and ask myself some question. Then I just had to change from singing blues and begin to go back to what my old parents said—singing spiritual songs.

And I found out that's better.

Mr. William Saunders

THIS IS GOOD, BUT IT DOESN'T HELP YOUR EATING

159 794 We all as kids went to Moving Star Hall. As far as I was concerned, I 794 just had to be there. We used to enjoy the singing and the shouting. And at 796 a certain period of the night, all the youngsters in there had to go up front 786 and kneel down and everybody prayed. That place used to be full—three [078] nights a week. You couldn't get in that place if you be late on Sunday nights. And it was so much young people. All of a sudden it just start dying off.

159 For one thing most of the young people started going away. Like me, 794 I went in the Army. I was about fifteen. Once the kids start going to differ- 178 ent places, and we start to be more enlightened, then we start getting away 852 from this old type of thing. As we get more education, we come to find out 794 that this wasn't the type of thing we needed to help us through the world. 796 We needed more than this. This is good, but it doesn't help your eating. Why waste time with something that you aren't gonna get anything out of at all? You gonna be looking forward to when you die, and man, you hungry now.

That Moving Star Hall business just about died out completely. Then they started building it back up again. Now some of the people, the Moving Star Hall Singers, are enjoying some of the fruit of their labor.

41 Caravan & Caravan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mrs. Betsy Pinckney

YOU CAN BE BLACK OR SCARLET

829 Now some people after slavery times think to themselves, "If I see a white and he needs help, but they didn't tell me to do it, I wouldn't do it anymore." But me, I go there and they ain't call me neither. He need help and his family need it, and that's the reason God help some people to get along so good.

I treat everybody right; my heart open for all. And that's why people treat me well for it. That's right! Sometime I pick the bean and I say, "I ought to give 'em a quart of bean." Well, when I send that bean, how they glad.

I don't care what kind of people, I going there and help 'em. I do it, sir. I got proof! You can be black or scarlet but it don't make no difference. The pure in heart shall see God.

Mrs. Alice Wine

NOW THE WORLD IS NOTHING BUT WHITE PEOPLE

829 When I were growing up, I must have seen one white man in my life. 177 And I was so scared of that white man I never see his face. You might see but two white man in the whole Johns Island then. But now the island is full of white people. There so many white people it seem like there always one now. Before then you wouldn't see no white people there in six or seven months. But now, the world is nothing but white people. White people!

829 The Bible says you must love your fellow mans, 'gardless of what color 999 you are, you must love 'em. Ain't no need for I love my color, hate you. 'Cause God don't please with it. 'Cause we all is God's children. We must love one another.

829 The church doesn't do a thing for you no more than preach a sermon. 999 That's all the preacher do for you. But you got to live a life living right here. The way you walk and the way you talk, the way your action—there's your sermon right there. You preaching your sermon before you die.

The way you treat people, that's your heaven right there. Now if you born dumb, you just dumb. If you're a mean person all your life, you're just a mean person; people can't say good for you. If you're a good person all your life, that's all people will say is he's a good person. Got to first have heaven here before you have Heaven. If you have speck in your heart, you cannot get in God's kingdom. I never been up there yet, but I feel about it.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. Benjamin Bligen

I FIND NO FAULT LIVING HERE ON THE ISLAND

823 Johns Island is my home. I was born and raised here and it's peaceful. I've traveled across different parts of the world and I love different places, but I love Johns Island the best. There's peace and quiet here and nice places to go if you feel like travel. You can go in the river. You can go swimming if you want to. You can go fishing if you want to. You can go crabbing if you want to do that. You can go and sing and shout if you want to; no one to stop you. I find no fault living here on the island. I love it here. I make up my mind to be here until the Lord make a change in my life, to take me on home.

533 The singing brings joy to your soul. Regardless of how much you feel down and you feel like you can't move, you start singing one of those songs and it brings joy to your soul and lifts you up. You start thinking about the good things, and we realize we've got somebody on our side. We're trying to pass it on to the younger folks so they can carry the old traditions on. Our old folks taught us these songs and they would like for we to carry it on through [178 186] and they would like for we to pass it on to the young generation so they can keep it up. And I hope that many and many that come to our different churches will hear these songs and sing these songs and will be able to carry it on when the older ones have passed on out of this world.

● 771 869 It's a different time now than when I was growing up. It's harder now to get the young people to come on the old side. My family had a strong religion. I try to keep on the road that they was traveling on and do the things they want me to do. Hopefully, I will be able to teach the young people the way that my old folks taught me, that they will have something that will stand by them when trouble rise. Whatever comes up against them in life they will have something to hold onto, something that will deliver them in the time of their need.

4: Carawan & Carawan. B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mrs. Ruth Bligen
I LIKE TO BE ALONG WITH THE OLD PEOPLE

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In church we have a lot of different choirs. But if you want to raise a song, you do that. Sometimes I'll sing. Sometimes Benji will sing. We have a good time. Our pastor is very nice. He likes singing, too. He likes singing and shouting. On Thursday nights, we have prayer meeting at the church. You express yourself and pray. It's like in the hall. The young children are not going to carry on like the old people. But I like the old people. I like to be along with the old people. And we had some wonderful times in Moving Star. I don't think the old songs will die out. We still sing it. I love the old songs.

Mr. William Saunders
IT'S THE PLACE WHERE PEOPLE SINK OR SWIM

• 771 794

I feel I am more fortunate than most of the people who are fighting in the arena I'm fighting in because I have a way to recharge my batteries. The religious aspect of my life is pretty real to me. It gives me a lot of strength. Wesley has been my power base. It has made me feel capable of doing anything.

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It's real to me. The singing of a person like Ruth Bligen. To hear her some Sunday morning. Her voice is purer now than it's ever been. She just gets to the place that she passes out. Just knowing what she's been through, when she sings it's not a performance. You can see Benji on a Sunday morning. He's so articulate and his Gullah becomes more profound than most people because he says it so distinctly. But to see him pray and he gets to a point where he's got to stop; and somebody's got to go and take him down because of his problems.

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It's the place where people sink or swim. And it's the only thing they have to turn to. And yet they're always walking with their heads held high. And that's a strength that the people had on the island that I believe is dying. That strength and the proudness is not there anymore like it used to be. Sometimes you skip a generation, for whatever reason. So maybe the cycle will come back again.

But it's a base for me. It's my power source. I come back to the city, where I can go for another six days with all of the adversities that face me.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. William Saunders

THE CULTURAL THING IS SOMETHING THAT CAN ALWAYS GO ON

When we had the festivals on Johns Island back in the sixties with the folk from Moving Star Hall, the Georgia sea islands, and the young freedom singers, nothing was happening in isolation. It was a time in history when a lot was going on—voter registration, awareness, blacks were about being black. Everything fit in, and the festival was like the tape that brings a lot of things together. It really kept people's spirits up, and that is what was needed at that particular time. We needed to draw on each other. The religious aspect of it was key. Most of the white community around here really don't understand the strength of something like that.

For instance, the Hospital Workers' strike just grew out of that whole thing. The same singing went on in all the things we were organizing. It never changed. It stayed the same. The song is sung according to the mood of the people that day. And very rarely the same words are used. The tempo is different depending on whether it's sad or happy. You cannot really capture that.

I think the festivals we did were really a benefit and a strength to the community itself. It was the only legitimate place that blacks and whites could get together. Everybody enjoyed themselves and it was part of our expression for that time. It would not be workable today, because all of those things are not in place anymore. You would have to have a different reason.

Now you would have it based on culture. If it were to be more than that, that thrust would have to be defined. When we did it back in the sixties, the political thrust was already there. We knew exactly who our enemy was. We didn't have any question about what was right and what was wrong.

But the cultural thing is something that can always go on. And there are so many young people that have been left out of that era. So if you do it from a historical perspective, it's workable.

6: Smith I,Y-5 (no date) 1989
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796 services as depicted in the literature is still rather accurate and need not be entertained here, except to say that the general patternings of the services and demonstrations of faith via "shouting" has remained as a center of church services.

The Church Structure

794 (793) The Pastor is the head of each church. There may or may not be a pastor "in training" to assist as needed. Under the Pastor is the Elder Council of Deacons. This body is comprised of the oldest male members of the congregations. The Deacons Council, through a committee structure, runs the affairs of the church. Next in the structure are the Elder Mothers, followed by the general congregations. Aside from their committee responsibilities, the Elder Deacons take part in Sunday services. An extremely learned body, the Elders are easily as able in the scriptures as the Pastors. Their learned abilities and oratorical skills are particularly evident during Funeral services. In these services, the Deacons take turns recalling through their eyes the life of the deceased person. Their eulogies delivered by these Soul stirring orators are the highlighted feature of the rites.

791 554 The Practice of the Sea Island Religion

The islander does not simply outgrow religion. On the

6: Smith I,Y-5 (no date) 1989
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•771 islands a man's worth is measured by his religious dedica-
[554 tion. This is so much the case, that the question of out-growing religion, or active versus the inactive participation of the congregation is not a legitimate concern. The practice of weekday religion is more vigorous than the Sunday demonstrations of faith.

Here on the Islands, religion penetrates every aspect of life. It is rare to encounter islanders who are not learned in the scriptures. This includes islanders who be-
791 cause of personal conflicts with the church's institution-
795 alized style, no longer attend Sunday services. The blunt of this disagreement is usually focused at the church's social inactivity; they say the church simply is not doing enough.

The Church's Doings

795 Before the coming of community action programs, helping
794 neighbors in need was the exclusive role of the church. To some extent, the church is still the most active agent in this regard. Whose analysis shows that congregation members make up the policy making bodies of all the community action programs on the island. It appears, now that these program resources are available, the church has taken a more indirect role. Rather than continuing the tradition of neighbor helping neighbor, neighbors in need are now directed to available program resources. When the need is

795 outside the realm of the existing programs, the older tradi-
794 tional methods of helping are reenacted.

794 The Young Islander and the Church
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795

> Gome ta ole timb religion, gome to ole timb religion, gome ta ole timb religion. It be good enoub fer ma mama, it be good enoub fer ma papa, it be good enoub fer me. It be good enoub fer me.

This ole song of religion dedication still ha[illegible] and is still the path taken by younger islanders. But the path these days is not taken without hesitation. Younger islanders spend a great deal of time in discussion of the worths and limitations of the church. The focus of much of this discussion is on the dominance of Elders. The younger islanders feel that the Elders are maintaining the church in the ole manner which excludes their influence. Elders in
[791] turn suggest that the practice of religion is a long time faith, that the young ones are recent to their belief and have not paid the religious dues which warrants keeping company (having input into the church) with the ole time practitioners. In spite of the disagreements the young continue to participate in the church.

SEA ISLAND MAGIC MEDICINE:
A CONSEQUENCE OF NECESSITY

758 Sea Islanders have never had ready access to medical
759 personnel. There are only two doctors on the islands. Both the doctors and a new health clinic system are recent to the

6: Smith I,Y-5 (no date) 1989
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South Carolina

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

771 (114) Crum[22] claimed that the Gullah people have no interest in the future. This researcher found the case to be the opposite. The Gullahs, the elders in particular, are constantly looking ahead to the day on which their life patterns will be judged fitting to "keep eternal company in the Great Kingdom." Their life paths and worldly efforts are aimed at nothing else than at the day when their deeds will be reviewed. It is with the religious context, that the discipline behaviors of the Gullah people must be understood. Malicious acts of child abuse, and the heavy handed parent are frowned upon. Discipline acts for the Gullah, are aimed primarily at keeping the child "en d steppn of d Lord," meaning that the purpose of much of the discipline behavior is to prepare the child for demands of living the religious existence. Dr. Spock's notions of child rearing have no relevance in the Gullah household. Here the teachings contained in the Bible are the guide posts the parent follows. Discipline manifested as physical punishment appear to be no more frequent than the verbal

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[22] Crum, op. cit.

771 861 182 means of socialization. The sternness of the religious behaviors of the Gullah people are metered down into their discipline behavior. Among these people the 99.9% effort toward adherence to religious commandments as in child rearing just is not good enough. The only acceptable effort is all the way. This often reached quest for total committment in religious activities is the basis upon which the obedience of children are judged. This must be constantly in mind when interpreting the discipline behaviors of Gullah parents.

861 (867) Gullah parents are constant observers of the behavior of children. The boundaries around what constitutes asocial behavior are clearly understood and learned early. The child in turn knows full well what behaviors will elicit which response by the parent. In accord with the religious teachings, the parent will not hesitate to punish disobedient behavior. Punishment though is not always or most frequently manifested in its physical form, but rather the form of discipline used will depend on any number of factors in the environment. The prime determinant being the overall behavior of the child. Gullah parents emphasized to this researcher that discipline must be tendened with mercy. "Billie ya ca'n trash dem all d timb, ya gotta scol some en beat some." They felt total reliance on physical discipline in disregard to the overall behaviors and

861 mannerism of the child was extremely unjust. They say the
[771] teachings of the Lord make clear that if the parent blindly
[593] follows the bully path results in the child losing respect.
In this belief, parents with guided deliberation employ the discipline interaction.

It must be emphasized that these interactions are just
[577] not that frequent. Gullah children are respectful and obedient, behaviors which are less than that are not tolerated. In turn rarely does the Gullah parent discipline the child who has been socialized properly.

861 The Gullah parent on the nearer islands agreed that the
177 properly socialized child is not a problem. This child is on the right path. But they are concerned about factors in the environment which act to make for proper rearing of children increasingly difficult. As these parents see it and as was supported by the study, on the nearer islands the effects of greater exposure to mainland life styles makes it increasingly difficult to rear children to "the proper" levels of obedience. Elder Richardson explains the situation this way: "d paren should be shami while d roun en de high skire, lib en n out of sin. D chillin got no choice dan ta act lik d paren. It ain't d chilln falt mind ya, it d blame ob d paren. Dey responsible fer d chil, dey must brin d chil ta d wae ob d bible. I jus dan't no waat goina happen ta d chillin ta dae. Ef d paren dan't see ta

86 178 56 593 the island children. The parents themselves have been away from this habit for nearly as many years as they were engaged in it. Consequently, the stern disciplinary demands of the farm habit was not bei.: transferred to this generation of young islanders. In this light, the childhood histories of the elder parents was discussed. It was seen hov the harsh work habits required in farming families demanded the obedient behavior of children. Under the burden of farm labor, parents were less tolerant of disobedience than parents are today. The reason given was again differences in occupation. It was also said that parents 86 184 living in isolated communities were apt to discipline children more quickly than parents who have jobs, because they spend time with their children. For the farming parents, the fatigue element was said to diminish their tolerance level, and that isolated households operate in an everytime reaction ratio. These religious beliefs were •771 86 introduced as elements which influence frequency and methods of discipline. Gullah Island parents, in this vain, strived to rear children under, and by guidance of the Bible. In 562 86 discussing the sex role differences, parents tend to more rigidly enforce discipline on female children. This relationship was explained along two lines. The first was the status that the male child has on the islands. Here a dominance of females places a premium upon male children.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
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Georgia
St. Simon's Island

spot long enough to find out many fascinating things about Africa's black residents, mentions the fact that "In the cold wet months it is inconvenient to have . . . a [funeral] feast, and if some one dies at that time of year, the feast is often postponed until the dry season."

Negro preachers—particularly those who possess good voices and a store of spicy proverbs—often deliver sermons and offer prayers that stick in the mind. One I heard in Liberty County (the one whom I thought afflicted) expatiated on the subject of sin. He made it clear that certain types were worse than others. "Sin is a mean thing," and his tone was scornful; but when he said: "Self is a terrible thing!" it was thunderous and convincing. In a barn of a church in Camden County the substance of the preacher's prayer was in these touchingly earnest words: "We're down here, Lord, chewin' on dry bones an' swallerin' bitter pills. We can't do nothin' without You." Whatever may be said about the emotional character of the religion of our American Negro, it must be conceded that his sins are of the flesh rather than the spirit. He is generous with his last crust, and there would be no need of orphanages if white people, in proportion to their means, adopted as many children as colored people.

When it comes to terse economy of speech we are obliged to concede that no one can equal the Negro. Mrs. Annie Arnold, born on St. Simon's in 1844, gave me the perfect example of this fact in recounting a bit of local history. A cargo of slaves of the Ebo tribe had been landed at a suspiciously secluded spot on the west side of the island. They preferred death to a life of captivity, and as they walked into the water the leader said: "The water brought us here. The water will take us away." No one but an African could have expressed such poignant unhappiness in so few words. In view of the fact known to traders that the Ebo men made poor slaves and were prone to suicide,[35] the account is probably true. The Negroes believe the story, and to this day they have to be extremely hungry to fish by themselves at Ebo Landing. One night a few years ago some colored boys braved tradition, and went 'possum hunting in the neighborhood. I have my own ideas as to the real cause of their terrifying experience, but the fact remains that no others have been tempted to repeat it.

Sir Charles Lyell tells us that "The slave trade ceased in 1796, and but few negroes were smuggled into Georgia from foreign countries, except indirectly for

[35] For this reason as few as possible were accepted by the traders.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
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Geoffrey Gorer tells us, in *Africa Dances*, that the primitive Negroes "know that the world is entirely spiritual," and "if we are sane" in believing that the physical universe, whether animate or inanimate, is bound by certain laws, which produce certain predictable effects, then "they are just mad. . . . This madness is not always apparent, for superficially Negroes seem to go about the ordinary business of life in a fairly normal way." It is only when you try to persuade them that they are not logical, that you find you cannot influence the most important side of their lives.

In this country the abolitionists seized upon this trait, and made much of it in their writings about the slaves' religious songs. The favorite theme of these writers was that in thinking of the world to come, and singing about it, the slaves found release from the misery of their lot here below—which has always seemed to me like a lot of sentimental nonsense. Their forebears were deeply religious people, and, as Gorer states, "religion is for us a thing apart [like our music]; for the African Negroes their whole existence." Explorers in Africa have told us, times without number, that music is as much a part of the life of the native as breathing—just as it was with our slaves in ante-bellum days. I can imagine Old Elizabeth singing this song until she went into a trance-like state. Gorer mentions that "Negroes can put themselves into very peculiar physical-mental states with extraordinary ease. They will go into trances, or throw fits at the slightest provocation. Even a Negro beating a tom-tom quickly becomes very strange; his pupils dilate and do not focus, he seems to become a rhythmic and unconscious automaton." From first-hand experience, I know that this characteristic survives to a surprising degree among our rural Negroes of the Georgia Coast.

Throw me any way
In dhat ole fiel'
Throw me any way
In dhat ole fiel'.
I don' care whah you throw me
In dhat ole fiel'
I don' care whah you throw me
In dhat ole fiel'.
Throw me ova hills an' mountains
In dhat ole fiel'
Throw me ova hills an' mountains
In dhat ole fiel'.
Sometimes I'm up sometimes I'm down
In dhat ole fiel'
But still my soul is heaven boun'
In dhat ole fiel'.
Throw my mother out a doo's
In dhat ole fiel'
Throw my mother out a doo's
In dhat ole fiel'.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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DRINKIN' OF THE WINE

The swinging rhythm of the communion song, "Drinkin' of the Wine," made it a favorite with the chain-gang for cutting weeds along the highway. The afternoon I heard it sung by convicts in front of my house, there were no chains to be seen or heard. When I asked the guard the reason, he told me they were used only to enforce camp discipline. The prisoners had been on their good behavior that week, and the chains had been left off.

I mentioned the incongruity of wearing stripes[30] and singing spirituals. He laughed and said the prisoners got very religious while in camp. It is a fact, however, that the Negro takes his religion very seriously, and, given time for meditation—enforced though it be—quite naturally reacts in this way. Then, too, he apparently has a different concept of morality from white people, and in consequence the idea prevails among us that he does not put his religion into practice. But, for that matter, who does? Each race seems to have its own particular blind spot, and inability to recognize the sanctity of property appears to the white man to be the hereditary weakness of the Negroes in this country, as in Africa. Before the white man meddled with their lives, it was considered legitimate business for the inhabitants of one community to steal from another. Up to the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, I am told, many a slave held the ingenious idea that property could not steal from property. It is possible that this notion, coupled with the viewpoint inherited from Africa,[31] may account for the tolerance still shown by the Negro toward the light-fingered members of the race who run afoul of the law.

According to a *London Morning Post* correspondent at Nairobi, capital of Kenya: "To the native mind there is nothing morally wrong in thefts of stock from other natives and from European farmers." This is possibly the reason why it is hard to get our primitive Negro to see that it is wrong to take a chicken from the roost when he is hungry, or a shirt off the clothes-line when he is half-naked. The same

[30] The "lifers" wear a plain drab suit and the lesser offenders, stripes. It should be the other way about. When convicts escape, as they often do, protective coloration gives the advantage to those who should not have it.

[31] In Astley's Collection, *John Leo* is quoted as saying that the Negroes on and between the Senegal and Gambia rivers lived in common. They had no property in land, but supported themselves in equal state, upon the natural produce of the country. Seagrave also comments on the fact there is no property in ground. The king's license is obtained and the people then go out in troops, and first clear the ground from bushes and weeds which they burn, "and so continue to work in a body for the public benefit, till every man's ground is tilled and sowed."

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
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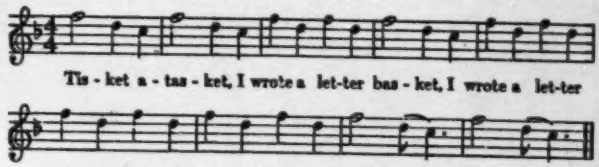
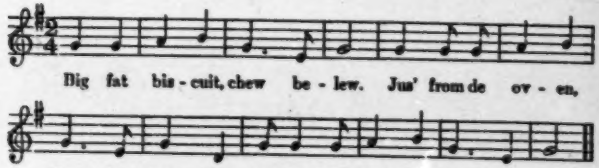
IV[39]



1. Tiskit, a-taskit, I wrote a letter basket.
I wrote a letter to my love an' on my way I dropped it.

V[39]



1. Big, fat biscuit, chew belew.
Jus' from de kitchen, chew belew.
Boy, jump over yonder, chew belew.

2. Big fat biscuit, etc.
Girl, jump over yonder, chew belew.

FOLK BELIEFS

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In general it may be said that the folk beliefs of the Negroes of St. Helena Island are not different from the

[39] This is a form of drop-the-handkerchief. The players were not all sure of the words. Some said, "I wrote a little basket," others said, "I made a little basket." The latter would make better sense, but the majority sang it as given here.

[39] The player designated in the third line runs to the place indicated by the singers. Compare Parsons, p. 201.

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beliefs of the Southern Negroes as a whole. Indeed, they have actually ceased to take seriously many of the old-time superstitions because of the influence which Penn School has had. Undoubtedly there are still some people who patronize "root doctors" or "cunjuh men," in order to procure charms of various sorts and to get "spells" or "voodoo" put on their enemies. There are also some who actually use the folk remedies for various ills, and there are some who plant crops and kill hogs according to lunar phases. But the general status of the island culture as far as superstition is concerned is not very far below the level of the more backward white groups in this country. A surprisingly large proportion of the Negro folk beliefs found in the South is of European descent, and this holds true for the beliefs of the St. Helena Island Negroes.

Following are some of the traditional folk beliefs which seem to be actually practiced to some extent. Midwives, without the patient's knowledge, sometimes put a hoe or plow point or an ax under the bed to cut the after-pains attending child-birth. It is also thought that if the patient will drink tea made from gizzard which has been dried and powdered, or tea made from the nest of the mud dauber, the after-pains will be reduced. Most families try to pay the midwife promptly for her services, for it is believed that failure to pay may cause her eyes, or even her mind, to be affected. Sometimes a Bible or a broom may be seen lying on the pillow above the head of a sick person. This is supposed to prevent the spirits from taking the person away. Mrs. King, the community nurse, stated that she has occasionally had to combat the use of such remedies as cow excreta and vinegar heated for boils,